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By Bill Heavey

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MARCH 2015

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P. 56

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BY BILL HEAVEY

Public Service
Announcement

TEST

From the office of takemefishing.org.



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Please take a few moments to consider each of the questions below. Take your time. Let it come naturally.

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DIRECTIONS

1. Use No. 2 pencil.
2. Do NOT use a No. 1 pencil.
3. We don't know why. Just don't.

1

Is this your idea of fishing with friends?

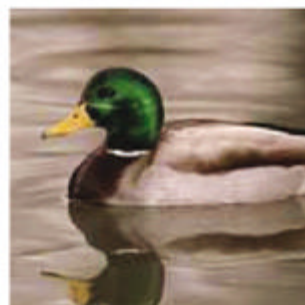
- (A) Yes, I am a 1,200-pound brown bear, and these are my friends.
- (B) Yes, I stand at the edge of the falls and catch fish with my mouth.
- (C) No.



2

Are you your own boat?

- (A) Yes, and please stop staring at my stern.
- (B) No, I'm my own airplane.
- (C) No.



3

Do you want this in your favorite lake?

- (A) Yes. Landfills are soooo cliché.
- (B) Sure, who doesn't love dipping their toes into a pool of swirling sewage?
- (C) No.



ANSWERS:

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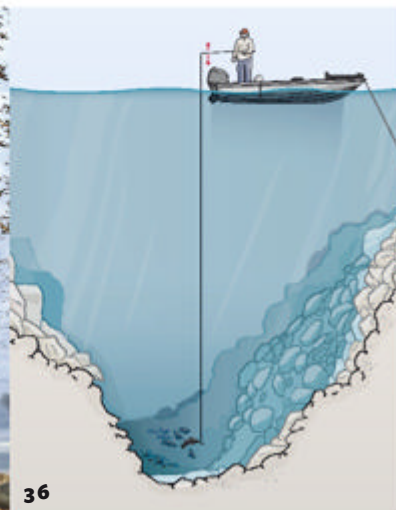


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FROM
THE
EDITOR

F&S

Money Talks

THERE ARE LOTS OF WAYS THAT YOUR WALLET HELPS FISH AND WILDLIFE

I'M WRITING THIS from the 2015 Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade (SHOT) Show, the industry's annual trade show. There are 64,000 of us here in Las Vegas who have come to buy, sell, and gawk at the insane amount of innovative products on display. It's hard not to leave this show feeling good about the future of these sports.

Let's face it: Money talks. And when it comes to hunting, fishing, and shooting, money talks the loudest to the general public—the kind of people who may not hunt, fish, or shoot but who can have a significant impact on what we do.

I think these sports have a value that goes way beyond dollars and cents, but here are some fun facts for the next time some nonhunter is unmoved by your talk of “sporting heritage.” Hunters and fishermen spend \$76 billion a year directly on their passions, so much money that if we were a corporation, we'd be in the top 20 in the U.S. When you add in the trickle-down economic impact to gas stations, motels, restaurants, etc., the number is closer to \$192 billion. Through an excise tax on guns and ammunition (a law known as Pittman-Robertson) and boats, boating fuel, and tackle (the Dingell-Johnson Act), sportsmen raised \$882 million in 2013 alone, money that goes directly to fund wildlife and fisheries conservation.

Unfortunately, in these days of strained budgets and competing economic interests, these vast sums aren't quite enough. That's where conservation and sporting-rights groups come in, organizations like the NRA, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, just to name a few. Joining these groups adds crucial additional dollars to the fight and—maybe more important—creates the political clout that comes from like-minded folks working together. Simply put, the best way to make sure your voice is heard in D.C. and your state capital is to join up and get involved.

So when the great gear that I'm seeing at this year's SHOT Show starts appearing on the shelves of your local sporting-goods store, go ahead and buy that rifle or treestand—hey, you're contributing to the economy and protecting wildlife, right? But don't forget: For the price of a box of premium ammo, you can join an organization that will be on watch 24/7 for you, protecting fish, wildlife, and your rights as a sportsman. To me, that's a bargain.

Anthony Licata

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Chocolate-milk river conditions kept photographer **Ian Allen** from fishing with guide Mikey Dvorak (p. 68), but he spends many weekends shore-casting to sockeye salmon in Puget Sound. He first took up flyfishing in New York before moving his business west, where he contributes to *Time*, *Outside*, *Wired*, and more.



After four years of managing the Best of the Best Awards (p. 56), F&S deputy editor and *SHOT Business* editor **Slaton L. White** can recall the good, the bad, and the flammable: “Keith McCafferty once put a wool jacket into a campfire to see if it would catch fire,” says White, who has served many roles in his 33 years at F&S. “That’s dedication to duty.”

DENVER BRYAN/IMAGES ON THE WILDSIDE (FAMILY): MILLER MOBLEY (LICATA)



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PHOTOGRAPHER: MITCH KEZAR
LOCATION: GEARY COUNTY, KAN.





FIRST SHOT

BOUGH HUNT

✱ Kevin Kezar paddled this canoe under some low-hanging branches on the Republican River in northeast Kansas, where he and his brother, photographer Mitch Kezar, were bowhunting early-spring Easterns. “We like to spot-and-stalk or chase after turkeys,” says Mitch. “I’ve killed 18 birds that way. It’s challenging. I’ve gone to Texas, called in 39 birds, and never pulled a string on one of them. Without a blind, that’s too many eyes.”

“I went into the Air Force when Kevin was only 4, so we didn’t get to hunt together much growing up in Minnesota,” Mitch adds. Now, they pursue deer, antelope, pigs, or turkeys together at least once a year. “A lot has changed. We used to shoot any deer that moved during our brief gun season, but all my nephews bowhunt, and their season is like 90 days long. It’s pretty cool to hear them talk about passing on a buck; they really care about the resource.”

—KRISTYN BRADY

CHEERS & JEERS

CHILLING TRACKS IN THE SNOW, OFFHAND GOSPEL, D.I.Y. BUTCHERING, AND BUILDING NO-SWEAT EQUITY



EVERY INCH COUNTS

F&S is perfect. A reader can't afford to overlook a single inch of type—some of the best reads are the little snippets that seem to fill vacant space. Nessmuk would be proud of the current publication.
R. Wayne Moorhead, Leawood, Kan.

MYSTERY ON THE MOUNTAIN

I thoroughly enjoyed Rick Bass's "Lions of Winter" (Dec. 2014–Jan. 2015). As I read, I could feel the cold stillness of the winter woods just before sundown and that heightened sense of awareness, spiked with fear, that comes from knowing a potential man-killer is close by.

Sam Whiteleather, Winslow, Ind.

It's not the kill that makes hunting so special; it's the close encounters with the mysteries of nature. True sportsmen feel even closer to the humans who practiced wild arts for thousands of years when we discover we're not

the only ones hunting game in the woods.

wildnwn, via fieldandstream.com

STANDING OVATION

Cheers to David E. Petzal's advice for offhand shooting ("Be a Man, Shoot Offhand," Rifles). No one can stand as still as a stone statue, and his technique will work for handgun shooters, too. I'd add that a good trigger is essential for releasing the firing pin just as the sight alignment crosses the desired impact point.

Mike Kuzara, Sheridan, Wyo.

Offhand shooting is hard, but it's a necessity. I would not have tagged

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my first deer with a gun if I'd been looking for something to lean on.

TheArcher87,
via fieldandstream.com

PRIME CUTS

At 62 years old, I haven't brought any of the 75 deer I've harvested to a processor, so I was impressed by T. Edward Nickens's article, "Cut Above the Rest" (The Total Outdoorsman). I use only a fillet knife for skinning and separation of loins, strap, shoulders, brisket, and roasts, before cutting the bones with a saw. I like the length and spring of the knife blade.

Rich Sankovich,
Winchester, Va.

Skinning and processing a deer is a family event in my household. My 12- and 7-year-old sons help

as much as their abilities allow, and my wife labels and packages the finished product. Although it can be a chore, I believe it adds to the hunting experience and gives a proper tribute to the animal that died to feed my family.

Jeffery Shoults, Potosi, Mo.

GROUND CONTROL

In "Ground Rules," David Draper encourages the reader to cook a burger for three minutes, flip only once, and grill another three minutes to a moist, medium-rare finish ("Build a Better Burger"). This is a recipe for disaster. It is O.K. to grill a steak for three minutes to a side, because the exterior of the meat, where contamination might be, is heat treated. But when meat is ground, any contamination will be spread throughout the burger. For this reason,

ground meat should always be cooked to 160 degrees, or until the juices run clear, so that pathogens are heat treated. It can still be moist when prepared safely.

Lloyd Williams, Arvada, Colo.

DAVID DRAPER RESPONDS: Would I grill store-bought hamburger to medium-rare? No. The primary benefit of home butchering and grinding is control of the process from start to finish. I'll continue to eat my venison burgers medium-rare, knowing I haven't introduced any contaminants into it.

WETNESS BAR

I made a batch of the "Stealth Stick" (Projects, Sportsman's Notebook), and it works exactly as M.D. Johnson stated it would. I got just a bit of wax odor from mine. I'd recommend reapplying

every four hours, or for those who sweat a lot, maybe even more often. The initial cost of the bulk ingredients was prohibitive, but you can make a lot of deodorant for what you get.

Bob Kwasnick, New Bern, N.C.

COLD PLAY

Thanks for the reminder of a hunting opportunity that is often overlooked in "Squall Game" (Tactics, Sportsman's Notebook). Squirrel hunting, at any time of year, poses challenges that can sharpen your hunting and stalking abilities, and it's a blast in the snow.

ozarkghost,

via fieldandstream.com

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CHANCE FOR SNOW

Flocks of snow geese are migrating north right now in numbers that are indescribable. But to bring them into range, you'll need a solid hunting plan, loud calls, and a ton of dekes

By David Draper

CAMPFIRE



Geese Galore •

Snow goose hunters
in South Dakota fire
at a decoying flock.



A THOUSAND snow geese, maybe more, hang above me stacked on top of one another from 80 yards on up to, seemingly, the stratosphere. They're still too far to shoot, but I tighten my grip on the shotgun and widen my eyes to take in the spectacle. My ears, too, get a sensory overload. A flock of snows makes a lot of noise, and their excited calling easily drowns out the electronic caller's four speakers staked out in our spread. Every bird seems to have its own distinct call, and the chorus of squeaks, cackles, clucks, and whines grows in volume and intensity—as if every goose is pleading with the one next to it: *Let's get down there and eat—NOW!*

If you listen to some hunters, the snow goose season—or spring light goose conservation order, as it's known—is all about the body count. As much fun as it can be to dump an extended magazine's worth of rounds into a giant flock and watch dozens of snows drop out, the real thrill for true waterfowlers is getting those birds into range in the first place. It takes no small effort and a decent amount of luck, but when it happens, there is no experience in hunting that competes with hundreds upon hundreds of birds fluttering into the decoy spread at your feet, every one of them chattering at full volume.

MARCH MADNESS

Anxious hunters often commence their season in February, but it's easy to burn yourself out chasing the early migration's many false starts. Adult birds, some that have been making this northern flight for 20 years or more, are the first to arrive and, because of their experience, are the hardest to decoy



• **Head to Head**
Two snows add to the overall harvest.



I rose out of my layout blind and was momentarily stunned by the literal wall of snow geese in front of me.

and the most frustrating. No waterfowl teases hunters like a bright white adult snow goose. In March, however, the mottled gray juveniles bring up the rear. Not exactly wise to hunters, these younger birds decoy more readily, although fooling a gigantic flock of birds is never easy.

A successful snow goose hunt starts the evening before with a few hours behind the wheel. I like to drive snow-covered country roads and watch for birds coming and going from fields of disked corn stubble, green winter wheat, or last fall's millet crop that didn't get picked up before winter hit. Snow geese are voracious eaters, and competitive. They'll leapfrog over one another to get to the feed first. And they'll hit the same field day after day until it's stripped clean. Once you find a feeding flock, that's your cue to secure permission—then get a bit of sleep.

SOUND STRATEGY

The day of a snow goose hunt begins early; a 2 A.M. wake-up call isn't unusual. It takes a lot of time to set a spread of 40 or 50 dozen decoys. Some

hunters use just rags, wind socks, or silhouettes, but the deadliest spreads are a mix of all three, plus several dozen full-bodies scattered throughout. The effect is a big white blob in the middle of the field, attracting any flock flying within miles.

Although the wind usually blows in March, you can't count on it. Once a flock gets close, it takes motion and calling to bring them those few extra yards into range. Motion decoys come in all sizes and designs. My favorite, if only for the carnival effect it gives to what could already be viewed as an absurd endeavor, is one I hunted over last spring with Tony Vandemore at Habitat Flats. It can best be described as a carousel—except instead of painted horses, each of the five arms was adorned with flying snow goose decoys, 24 in all when fully kitted out. Plugged into a deep-cycle 12-volt battery (as ubiquitous in snow goose hunting as on bass boats), the motor whirled and the carousel creaked as it circled, mimicking the swirling tornado of a snow goose flock ready to land.

This hunting also requires you to be a sound engineer, running a spider's web of speaker wire to speakers set at each corner of the spread. Another deep-cycle battery provides power to the electronic caller, and every snow goose hunter has his own favorite playlist, one he typically guards with secrecy.

On my hunt with Vandemore last spring, his calls played to the snow geese's rising frenzy. For the previous two days we'd watched the flocks grow in size above us, only to drift away without coming into range. But when a single bird, a mottled gray juvenile, locked its wings and dropped into our spread that was all it took for the rest of the flock to commit. Soon hundreds of birds were racing to be the first on the ground. Over the din I could barely hear Vandemore from just a few feet away.

"Get 'em boys!"

I rose out of my layout blind and was momentarily stunned by the literal wall of snow geese in front of me. My first few shots were wild. I was flock shooting, and despite the flock's density, nothing dropped. My shotgun was fitted with an extended tube, and I had five more shots. I quickly checked my nerves, started to pick out single birds, and dropped them as the flock retreated like a wave receding off a beach. In seconds, the birds were out of range, but I couldn't help myself and fired my final shot.

GEAR TIP

PUT A SOCK IN IT

Movement is crucial to an effective snow goose spread, but you don't need a 12-volt merry-go-round to kill birds. Good wind-sock decoys flicker in the slightest breeze, giving the appearance of a few dozen (or hundred) waddling geese. My favorites are made by Sillo Socks (sillosocks.com). A dozen Snow Feeder decoys will set you back just \$60, and they weigh a couple of pounds total. They're an economical and lightweight way to add motion and quantity to your spread, without the need for a trailer full of bulky full-bodied decoys. —D.D.





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Editor



Peter B. Wright
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ESCAPES

HAWGS & HOGS

Shots at big bass and killer BBQ—your dream Southern road trip awaits **By David Draper**

IN MARCH, as bass in the lakes of the Tennessee River begin to spawn, anglers in Alabama gear up to fish, eat, sleep, and repeat for the next month. When it comes to part two of that equation, the region's famed barbecue joints provide sustenance to get you through a luncheon marathon. Here are the top spots to cast and eat.

1 TAKE YOUR PICK(WICK) Put yourself up, and your boat in, at Mississippi's J.P. Coleman State Park, which sits at the lower half of the South's premier smallmouth fishery: Pickwick Lake. Low water at this time of year will concentrate smallmouths, as well as the lake's trophy largemouths and spotted bass. Throw a suspended crankbait along flats or points near deeper water, or work a Texas-rigged trick worm around the river's many islands. If you're not finding the bass on your own, hire a pro. Roger Stegall (fishpickwick.com) is one of the lake's best guides.

2 SLAW DOWN Parking may be tight in downtown Florence, but your effort will pay off with one of north Alabama's best-kept barbecue secrets—the hot slaw at Bunyan's BBQ. This spicy, vinegary mess is the requisite dressing for the pit's outstanding pulled pork sandwiches or, as locals will attest, the hot dogs.

3 DAM GOOD FISHING Near Bunyan's is the McFarland Park boat launch below Wilson Dam. Carefully navigate your boat into the tailrace and free-line a threadfin shad through the seams created by the dam's discharge units. Fishing these roiling waters can be challenging—but you might boat the biggest smallie of your life.

4 THE WHITE STUFF No trip through Alabama barbecue country is complete without a stop at Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q (bigbobgibson.com) for a taste of the 90-year-old joint's original white sauce. Don't forget to finish with a slice of coconut pie.

5 EAT WITH THE LOCALS There's a lot of great barbecue in and around Huntsville, but locals will tell you it's worth the short drive northeast to New Market BBQ (newmarketbbq.com). If you want a taste of Texas barbecue in Alabama, Chuck Wagon BBQ across town in Madison has the best brisket east of Texarkana.

6 THE SPAWN DAWN A warming trend this month may get area bass moving into shallow water. The northern edges of Lake Guntersville's many bays will catch the sun and send the water here above 50 degrees. Cast shallow-diving crankbaits like a Cotton Cordell Super Spot or spinnerbaits in white or green into the shallows, targeting any cover you find. On cooler days, pull off a bit to search for dropoffs where bass should be staging. **FS**



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SHOTGUNS

THE ANYTHING AUTO

Remington's new V3 is at home in the uplands, in the duck marsh, and at the clays range **By Phil Bourjaily**



■ **Details** The V3 has a magazine cutoff button on the trigger guard, pressure compensating pistons, and a Modified Rem Choke.

IN A MARKET full of gas-operated autoloaders costing \$1,200 and more, Remington's new V3 delivers a soft-shooting bang for \$899. The V3 is a 3-inch-chambered gas semiauto with a definite family resemblance to the 3½-inch Versa Max, but it's a brand-new gun that actually shares no common parts with its bigger cousin.

In fact, whereas the Versa Max—the soft-shooting, low-maintenance, high-reliability gun Remington needed to catch up with the competition—was developed at the factory in Ilion, N.Y., the V3 is the brainchild of engineers at Remington's research facility in Elizabethtown, Ky. “Rather than shrink a Versa Max, we started from the ground up to make the best 3-inch gun on the market,” says shotgun product manager Mike Vrooman.

To appeal to a wide market, the V3 is designed to weigh less and cost less than the Versa Max. You can expect to see it in the uplands and duck blinds, on the target field, and in three-gun competitions.

The V3 does share the Versa Port system

Remington pioneered for the Versa Max. The gun's eight gas ports (the Versa Max has seven) are in the chambers. The longer the shell, the more ports it covers, essentially metering the amount of gas that reaches the pistons and allowing it to shoot a range of 2¾- and 3-inch ammunition.

The action spring of the V3 lies inside the receiver, not in the stock. It is easy to inspect and clean, and won't get wet and rusty when you dunk your stock wading with the gun slung over your shoulder.

It has the light contour barrel of the Model 11-87 (which I am betting the V3 will replace), and that barrel, coupled with an alloy receiver, keeps the weight to 7¼ pounds. It's surprisingly well balanced and lively to handle and shoot.

A unique magazine cutoff button sits at the front of the trigger guard. Pushing it forward elevates the carrier enough to block the magazine tube, enabling you to remove the shell in the chamber without cycling another. The crisp trigger breaks at 5 pounds to ounces.

The gas system of the V3 is, like that of

the Versa Max, very simple. A gas block beneath the chamber holds the two short pistons. You can't get at the ports to clean them, but apparently so much hot gas blasts through them that they stay clear of carbon buildup, similar to the gas tube on an AR-15. You do need a punch or Allen wrench, or even a nail in a pinch, to take the pistons out for cleaning.

I shot clays and hunted pheasants and waterfowl with a V3 last fall. On the range I noticed a slight bit more recoil than I feel with the Versa Max (which is, in my opinion, the softest-shooting gas gun of all). That may be attributable to the V3's lower weight. In the uplands I found it to be a light-carrying, sure-pointing pheasant gun, and I shot it well in the duck marsh, too. The only problem I had was one failure to cycle with 7⁄8-ounce reloads—although Remington doesn't claim it will cycle anything lighter than 1 ounce. And I don't care for the ugly plastic trigger guard.

The gun will come in black for \$899; camo for \$999. Unlike the Versa Max, which has a gas block so wide it can't be made with a wooden fore-end, there will be a walnut-stocked version for \$999. A target version is on the way, which may allow Remington to go head-to-head with Beretta for the target semiauto market (the gun would have to be tweaked to handle 7⁄8- and ¾-ounce reloads).

I doubt Remington will ever make shotguns as attractive as the 1100s and 870s of the 1970s again, and the V3 doesn't do much to change my belief. From what I can tell so far, though, the V3 is loaded with inner beauty. →

RINGNECK LOADS FOR GOBBLER GUNS

Winchester has followed up its introduction of the tight-patterning Long Beard XR with Rooster XR, a pheasant load using the same resin-based technology and available in 2¾-inch loads in 5 and 6 shot. I thought it might be perfect for older 2¾-inch-chambered, fixed Full-choke turkey guns. In my Full-choke 870, Rooster XR gave me turkey-killing patterns at 40 yards—and a reason to take my old gun hunting this spring. —P.B.





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CAMPFIRE



SHOTGUNS

THE LONGEST YARDS


The surprisingly fine line between killing a bird and blowing the shot By Phil Bourjaily

1 he longest yards in turkey hunting are the very few between “in range” and “out of range.” Even with the newest loads, there is a line before which your pattern consistently kills a turkey, and after which you can’t ethically shoot. Where you draw your line depends on both the distance at which your pattern is consistently deadly, and the distance at which you can place it accurately. The closer of the two is your maximum range. Here’s why:

1 PATTERNS DECAY QUICKLY Don’t assume because your gun shoots a deadly pattern at one distance that it will shoot a pattern almost as good 5 yards farther downrange. A load that was deadly in my gun at 40 yards made patchy, ugly patterns at 45. Shoot patterns

at 5-yard increments to learn where your load fails.

2 PATTERNS VARY One load I tried put 105 pellets in a 10-inch circle at 50 yards, then 76, then just 68. To establish maximum range, shoot at least three targets at each distance to truly see how a load performs. Judge effectiveness by the worst pattern a load shoots at a given distance—not the best pattern or the average of all three.

3 A PATTERN IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE SHOOTER Take some shots on the ground in a hunting position and see if you can consistently place your pellets on an aiming mark. Figure out what works for you now, before you’ve got a gobbler standing in front of you. 

Photograph by JARREN VINK

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ASK PETZAL

Q You are clearly an educated man. What university did you attend? Your major? Most rewarding class?

—DENNIS FEELY, VALPARAISO, NEB.

A: I am a graduate of Colgate University, where I was an English major. The most rewarding thing I did there was take as many courses as I possibly could (mostly Shakespeare) from a professor named Jonathan Kistler, who was a wizard, a magician, and a life changer. He could make you hear the music in words. On the 50th anniversary of my graduation, I visited his grave and thanked him.

Q: May I poke you on Facebook?

—JOEL JAMESON, CARMEL, IND.

A: You may not poke me anywhere, unless you would like a nice punch in the spleen by way of thanks. I am not on Facebook. I detest Facebook. I agree with Betty White who, when asked about Facebook, said, "I can't imagine a bigger waste of time."

Q: What was your worst hunting experience?

—NOAH SHULZ, MUSKEGO, WIS.

A: I've been on poorly run hunts where everyone suffered a lot with nothing to show for it, but those didn't really bother me. The worst hunting experiences, and there have been several, involved animals that were shot badly and suffered for days before they could be tracked down and killed. None of them were mine, thank God.

Q: Do you like cowboy action shooting?

—HANK JACKSON, DALLAS, TEXAS

A: Lacking the fast-twitch muscles needed for a lightning draw, I've never competed in it, but I think the sport is a fine idea and one that gives you an excuse to buy lots of expensive

stuff and dress up. Cowboy action shooting, however, bears absolutely no resemblance to what went on in the Old West. For a description of that, get a copy of *The Shootist*, by Glendon Swarthout. Mr. Swarthout did not know s - - t about guns, but he sure got the rest of it right.

Q: The Northeast deer hunters I grew up with split into two camps: those whose rifles shot .35 Remington, and .30/30 owners who wished they had .35s. Which camp would you be in?

—MICHAEL A. GREEN, BEAUFORT, S.C.

A: I've always thought the .35 Remington is the better cartridge; it shoots heavier bullets and packs more steam generally than the .30/30. And I've always thought that the Marlin lever guns that chambered the .35 were far better than the Model 94. Less machinery, better triggers, easier to scope, and a lot more accurate.

Q: Hello, Mighty Petzal. I got a Savage Model 11 in 7mm/08 for my 15th birthday. What do you think of my rifle?

—NATHANIEL HOPKINS, SUMTER, S.C.

A: "Mighty Petzal." Has a nice ring to it. I think that a lot of Savage rifles are pretty crude, that the pricier ones are really hot stuff, and that all are very good values. Savage target, varmint, and tactical rifles are about as good as anything you can get for those purposes. As for the 7mm/08, it is one of the best big-game loads you can lay hands on. I owned one for years and never had to shoot twice at anything. The daughter of a friend of mine took one to Africa and nailed 12 animals with 12 shots.

FS

Q
&
A

David E. Petzal answers your questions about guns, shooting, hunting, and life



GOT A QUESTION FOR OUR RIFLES EDITOR? Send it to askpetzal@fieldandstream.com. We cannot guarantee polite answers to all questions.



FISHING

THE STREAMER CULT

These flies will make you ache and bleed. They'll also fool big trout **By Joe Cermele**

I HAVE NEVER MET a trout guide who wouldn't readily admit that streamers put the most trophy trout in the net. I discovered this truth a few years ago, right around the time several new-school fly-tiers started pushing the envelope with trout streamers, patterns that made a Muddler Minnow look as puny as a Griffith's Gnat. Longer bodies, greater wiggle, extra bulk, more flash—there is nothing subtle about these flies.

At first I felt foolish casting 6 inches of meat on a trout stream, but the first time a big brown slammed the streamer, I was sold. Soon my go-to rod was a 7-weight instead of a 5, and after a few seasons I'd landed a lot more 20-inch browns. With each new photo I posted on Facebook, I got more questions about how to fish the big stuff. So, if you really want to join the streamer cult, here's what you need to be prepared for.

MAKE YOUR MOVE

The difference between a streamer junkie and a dry-fly guy is one waits for trout to eat, and the other *makes* them eat. Your Royal Coachman might drift over a big brown a dozen times without the fish so much as twitching a fin. But put a hunk of rabbit fur right in the trout's face, and the fish has only two choices: strike or scam. To get a streamer in front of maximum snouts, you have to be willing to cover loads of water. That's easy on a drift boat, but taxing on foot. A trout is likely to blast the fly on the first pass, so there's no sense in standing in a run for an hour. Get yourself some Dr. Scholl's Massaging Gel Insoles. I have them in all my wading boots.

MAKE IT SNAPPY

Despite how dainty a brown looks as it sips a caddis, never forget that it's a predator—an op-

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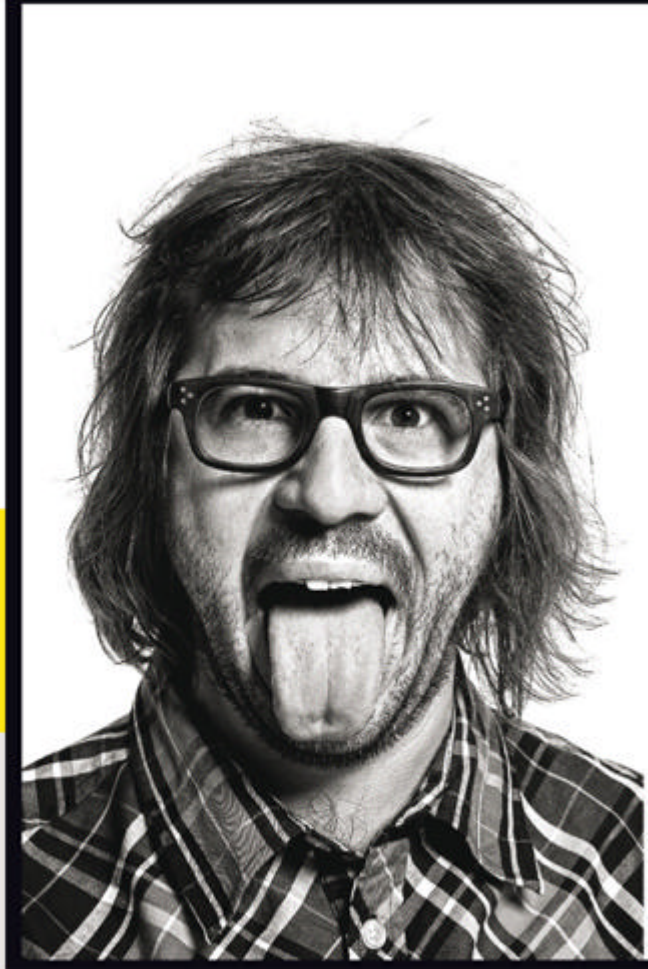
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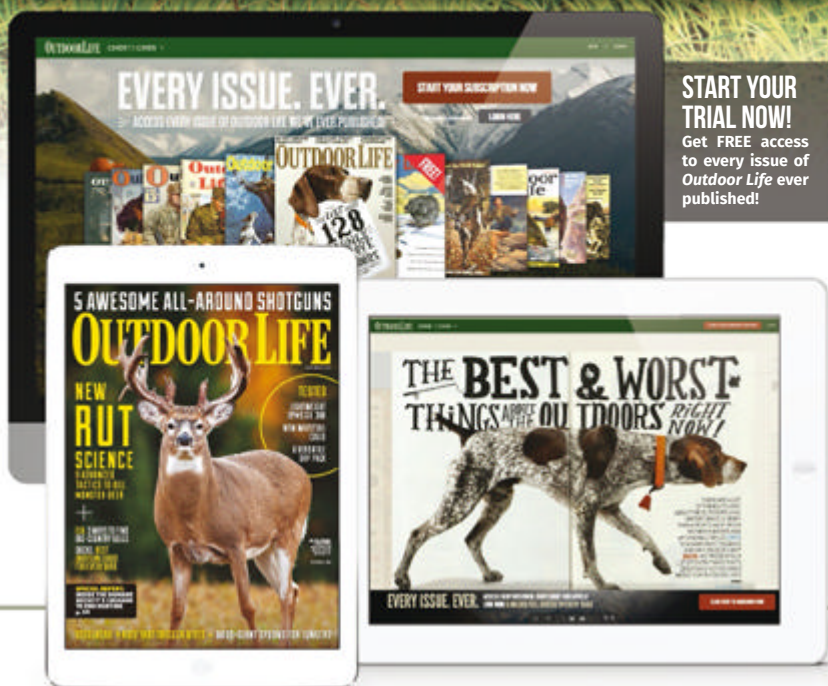
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CAMPFIRE

portunistic feeder—and it's mean. That's why I never want to give a trout time to think about hitting: I just want it to *hit*. I use a short sink tip, even with weighted flies in shallow water, because I don't want to give the bug any more time than is necessary for it to drift into a hole. The first three strips often draw the strike or coax a chase, so I want to cast right to my target and know my fly gets in the zone fast. Train yourself to keep the streamer moving constantly and aggressively, especially if a fish flashes and misses. I keep the fly working in short, fast pops. Lazy retrieves equal blown chances. If your arms don't ache by day's end, you're not doing it right.

MAKE THE CUT

If you *are* doing it right, don't be surprised if you cut a nice little groove between the knuckles of your stripping fingers. And if you use textured lines—or your fly line is dirty and gritty—you'll open the cut even faster. I can't count how many people have called me a wimp for taping my fingers during a streamer trip, only to ask if they could borrow my tape an hour later. If you don't want to deal with tape, Buff makes some snazzy reusable stripping guards. They've found a permanent home in my streamer gear bag, which will be the first thing I break out this spring, while everyone else looks for a needle in a haystack drifting nymphs in swollen waters. **FS**



TIP OF THE MONTH THE STINGING TRUTH

I used to think that two hooks in a streamer were better than one. Truth is, I can count on one hand how many browns I've landed on those trailing hooks. In the long run, all they do is cause more snags and tangles, or get planted in other parts of a trout's body during the fight. If a heavy brown decides it wants to eat, it's going to attack headfirst 99 percent of the time. These days, I still joint my streamers for the extra wiggle, but I leave the stingers off. My hookup rates haven't dropped one bit. —J.C.

TIM BOELAARS



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Volunteers step up to protect critical fish and game ecosystems

By Kristyn Brady



GUARDING A GULF FISHERY

JIM BARKULOO PANAMA CITY, FLA.

As the coordinator of the St. Andrew Bay Watch Program since 1991, Barkuloo has been training and organizing the efforts of 40 volunteers, who monitor water quality at 84 sampling stations throughout the watershed each month, in an effort to protect its essential habitat for redfish, spotted seatrout, and other gamefish. He helped secure a \$1 million grant from the Northwest Florida Water Management District to be shared between the water sampling program and a shoreline restoration project that will stabilize eroding areas with 1,000 acres of seagrass. He was also part of a team that successfully lobbied to redirect treated wastewater from a discharge point on West Bay to a new, naturally filtering 3,000-acre wetland park. Before retiring, Barkuloo spent 35 years as a fisheries biologist, most recently with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Jim is extremely knowledgeable, and our organization is highly regarded because of his involvement," says Patrice Couch, a part-time staffer for the Bay Watch program. "He's 85 years old, and we all just try to keep up with him."



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Despite being a retired fighter pilot, Meyr helped rally the community against the U.S. Air Force's plans to build bombing ranges on the Bruneau River and in critical habitat for bighorn sheep, pronghorns, and sage grouse near the Owyhee Plateau. He is a founding member of the Henry's Fork Watershed Council, the Owyhee County Sage Grouse Working Group, and the Owyhee Initiative, where he advocates for sharing water resources with fish, improving sage grouse habitat, and securing permanent protection for wilderness areas and rivers. "My biggest strength is bringing people together," he says. "If you see something wrong, you need to put your hand up."



HEALING A STEELHEAD RIVER

JASON ATKINSON CENTRAL POINT, ORE.

In a "pure labor of love" for the 263-mile Klamath River, Atkinson, a steelhead angler and former state senator, has spent five years making a documentary to raise awareness of a restoration plan to remove four dams—which do not supply irrigation waters—while promising certain rights to utility companies, farmers, ranchers, and tribal communities. Atkinson raised more than \$400,000 to make the 90-minute film, *A River Between Us*, and proceeds will go to the Klamath Basin Rangeland Trust. "I believe we can heal generations of hard feelings and restore a forgotten place," he says. "I want to build a movement through this film."



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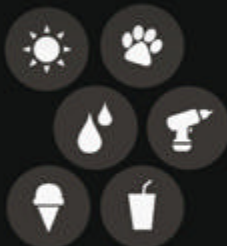
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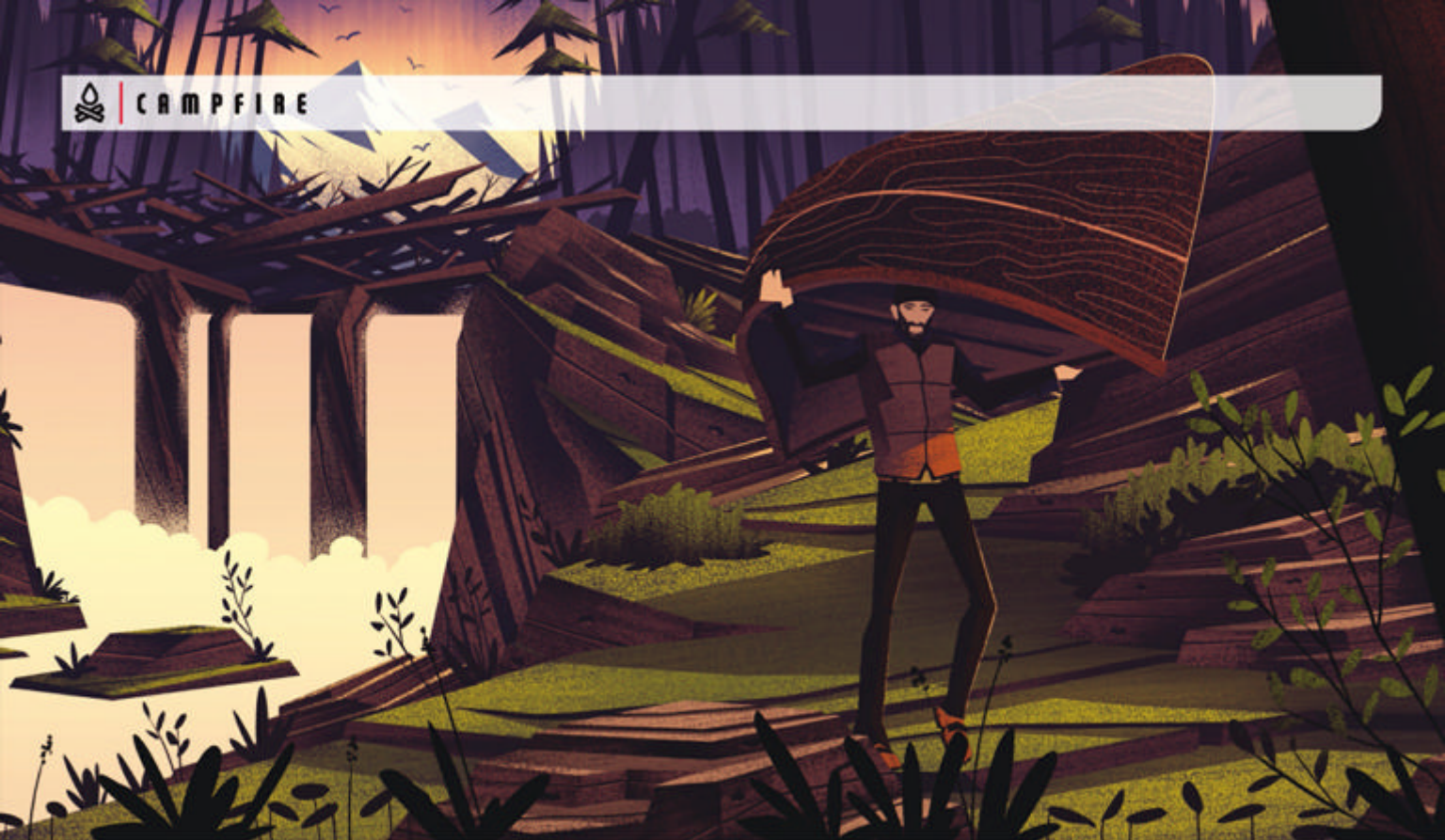


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THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN

PORTAGE AUTHORITY

Lugging loads of gear and your canoe through the wilderness isn't fun or easy, but it can be rewarding—especially if it leads you to trophy fish **By T. Edward Nickens**

THERE WAS WOLF SCAT on the trail. Knotty ropes of black poop bristled with some kind of mammal fur, but I couldn't bend over for a closer look. I had a 60-pound canoe portage pack on my back and a 30-pound barrel pack lashed to my chest. A half mile behind me, the water had run out in a dead-end channel, so there was no choice but to schlep boat and gear up and over a ridge, toward another blue line on the map. The trail was little more than an animal track that rose from the back of a riverside channel through mossy spruce, hemmed in by bluffs of Canadian Shield granite. When I got lucky, my boots got mired in shin-deep mud. On the unlucky steps, I slipped on hidden veins of granite, raking my calves against the rock. Blackflies feasted on the blood.

I wasn't the only one suffering. Up ahead on the trail, my buddy Scott Wood grunted through the thick timber with an 80-pound canoe on his shoulders. I caught up with him only because he had stopped to take a break. He'd rammed the bow of the canoe into the stout branches of a spruce, and bent over beneath the boat, hands on his knees. "That was a *climb*," he said, paring any unnecessary words. "Didn't want to lift the boat again."

I left him in the woods. There was nothing I could do to help. Wood and I were on an eight-day fishing trip through a glacier-scoured landscape, the river morphing from gentle pike stream to wind-frothed walleye lake to plunging whitewater river and back again. All told, we would paddle, portage, line, or drag the boat through and around 31 mostly nameless rapids, but this was the first serious portage—an escape route around Brennan Falls.

We endured boot-sucking muck, roots slick as eel snot, face-slapping tree boughs. The next time we passed on the trail, we greeted one another with little more than a grunt. We got all the gear in two trips. Not bad considering how many fly rods we'd brought along.

MANUAL LABOR

On its face, portaging is simple: To get around an obstacle—a beaver dam, rapids, a 90-foot waterfall—you hoist boat and gear on your shoulders, and hump through the woods until you're downstream of the blockage. Depending on what you're portaging around this can take 10 minutes, a day and a half, or a week. It took Lewis and Clark a month to portage 18 miles around the Great Falls of the Missouri. The fur-trapping *voyageurs* were famous for jogging portage trails with 90-pound packs. More than a few died from strangulated hernias.

I've had some hellish portages across Alaska, Ontario, Quebec, and Labrador, but what those brutal days on distant trails taught me has opened up big chunks of easier-to-access backcountry in the little creeks close to home. The fact is, a few downed trees and beaver dams will turn back nine out of 10 paddlers, but if you don't mind hauling gear over or around these logjams, you can find long, quiet floats where no one has paddled or fished in years. It's all about efficiency, and the approach applies to big north-woods portages and smaller carries alike. Pack as little as you can, in neat bundles, and minimize all the loose crap that rolls around in the boat and requires a half hour to secure at the portage trail. Have a plan in place: Somebody grabs a load of gear; somebody else hoists the canoe. And don't wring your hands over how hard



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portaging will be, because there's nothing to do but get it done.

Some of the best creek fishing and float hunting of my life required multiple canoe carries and liver-straining dosages of ibuprofen. My buddy Sam Toler and I once landed 175 redbreast sunfish, 15 largemouth bass, a dozen bluegills, three jacks, and a pair of suckers in an afternoon of creek fishing. We

had to bulldoze our way over and through a dozen blowdowns, and portage the boat around a half dozen more. We only broke one rod and never saw the footprint of another human.

NORTHERN HIGHLIGHT

In Ontario, the portage trail Wood and I were taking practically free-fell through the

woods on the back side of the ridge. I skidded down on my butt, holding the packs like I would a baby, and Wood roped the boat to the bottom. A thigh-deep quagmire of spike rush greeted us at water's edge, and we pushed the canoe for 50 yards until the goop contained enough liquid to float it. By then, we were slimed in mud to the waist and bleeding the rest of the way up from the brambles and blowdowns. The bay trembled with the percussion of the unrunnable falls, underscoring the fact that we made the right decision to bail on the river route. As we turned the boat back into the main flow of current, Wood cast a red-and-white deer-hair popper nearly the size of a tangerine. He stripped the fly twice, and we both saw it coming—a push of water and a slash of teeth. We had to beach the boat again so he could land the fish, a northern pike pushing 40 inches, a fish that might never have seen a fly before. It was a welcome paycheck for the portage's bloody shins and sore shoulders.

A thousand miles to the south, in my home waters, redeye bass and redbreast sunfish will soon be on the move. Chain pickerel are already spawning. Just last week I refinished the paddles I've hauled to northern waters half a dozen times. I'm asking around, poring over the maps of creeks, pointing to thin blue lines. People will say, "You can't paddle that. Too much stuff blocking the creek."

I'll put it on my list.

FS



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TIP OF THE MONTH STROKE OF GENIUS

Matching strokes will make the canoe move more quickly and with less energy, saving muscle power for hours of casting. It's easy. Since the stern paddler can watch the bow paddler but not vice versa, it's up to the stern paddler to match the bow paddler's stroke rhythm. And it's up to the bow paddler not to paddle like a drunken sailor.

Whenever either paddler tires and wants to switch sides, he simply announces, "Switch!" then gives it one more stroke, and both paddlers switch sides without missing a beat. —T.E.N.

SPECIAL
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TACTICS • TECHNIQUES

* FISHING * Handbook

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Daily Doubles

Pick the perfect two-fly
trout rig for morning,
noon, and night

By Will Ryan



Marabou Muddler Minnow

Tow for One
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Two-fly rigs allow anglers to present double the meal options to discerning trout. The best fly pairings, however, are no given. Trout streams and trout feeding behavior are dynamic. What works in the morning can just as easily strike out in the afternoon. Check your watch, and try these three killer combinations when the time is right.

1 MORNING

Tie a No. 6 weighted stonefly nymph to a 3X leader. Next, add 2 feet of 4X tippet to the bend in the nymph hook, and finish with a trailing No. 12 caddis pupa. Drift this combination below a strike indicator behind rocks and in eddies where natural nymphs are stirring. A large and small offering gives trout options prior to any hatch activity starting. Choose a stonefly in black or brown, as dark colors show better contrast in low light.

2 MIDDAY

As the sun gets higher, trout switch to surface feeding and eat both live bugs and dead mayflies that have fallen back to the water after mating. An easy way to present both options is to fish a No. 10 Irresistible with a No. 18 Adams a foot in tow. Clip the hackle off the bottom of the Adams so it sits flat in the film like a dead mayfly spinner. The bulky Irresistible not only draws strikes, but it helps you keep track of the location of the tiny Adams during the drift.

3 EVENING

Low light brings big trout out of hiding. They may be interested in eating bugs, or they may attack the smaller trout still sipping on the surface. To fool these toads, strip a No. 6 yellow Marabou Muddler with a No. 12 Leadwing Coachman bringing up the rear by 14 inches (above). The streamer will move plenty of water to get a meat eater's attention, and the large wet fly will imitate drowned aquatic insects that require less work to eat than snapping live bugs off the top. **FS**

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TECHNIQUES

Muskies at the Wire

Figure eight or L-turn?
Make that decision one

cast at a time **By Joe Cermele**

Muskie anglers love to debate the effectiveness of a figure eight versus an L-turn at the end of the retrieve. They bicker over how often you need to execute one or the other: every time, or only when you see a fish following? Both methods quickly change a lure's direction, which is often the trigger that causes a following muskie to strike. The truth is that they both have a time and a place. Keep these rules in mind, and you'll have a better shot at hooking the next muskie that's hot on your lure's tail.

TURN FOR THE BETTER

An L-turn is a quick sweep of the rod to the right or left when the lure is about 15 inches from the tip. This motion is far less physically taxing to perform than a figure eight, which is why many guides suggest making an L-turn at the end of every retrieve. It never hurts because a fish swimming below the lure may not be visible until the last second. I've also seen muskies shoot out from under the boat to eat a lure that's just about to be pulled from the water. On clear days, even though you may not feel like you need one because of the good visibility, an L-turn can score these surprise muskies.

FACTS ON FIGURES

When should you make a full figure eight at the end of the retrieve? Consider fish behavior and visibility. In low light, or if the water's stained, you may not be aware of whether you're being followed; therefore, keeping the lure in the water for a few extra seconds is never a bad idea. If the water clarity is poor, a figure eight also gives a trailing muskie more time to find the lure. In clear conditions, most guides make a figure eight only when they see a fish following, or if an L-turn wasn't enough to get a muskie to commit. Sometimes it can take several figure eights, or a change in speed during the motion, to draw the strike. **FS**


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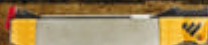
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New electronic lure may catch too many fish; one state bans it.

A bass every seven minutes.

by Mike Butler

NEWARK, DE—A new fishing technology that set a record for catching bass in Mexico is now showing its stuff in the U.S. It has out-fished shrimp bait in Washington State and beat top-selling U.S. lures three to one in Florida. The new technology is so effective one state, Wyoming, has banned its use.

The breakthrough is a tiny, battery-powered electrical system that flashes a blood-red light down a lure's tail when its moved in water. Fish think it's an injured prey and strike. Some fishing authorities, like those in Wyoming, think that gives fishermen too much of an advantage.

They may be right. Three fishermen using a flashing lure in Mexico caught 650 large-mouth bass in just 25 hours. That's a bass every seven minutes for each person, and a record for the lake they were fishing. They said the bass struck with such ferocity they hardly lost a strike.

In Florida two professionals fished for four hours from the same boat. One used a flashing-red lure; the other used some top-selling U. S. lures. The new, "bleeding" lure caught three times as many fish.

Before reporting this, I asked a veteran fisherman in my office for his opinion. Monday morning he charged into my office yelling "I caught six monster fish in an hour with this thing! Where did you get it?"

Then I phoned an ichthyologist (fish expert).

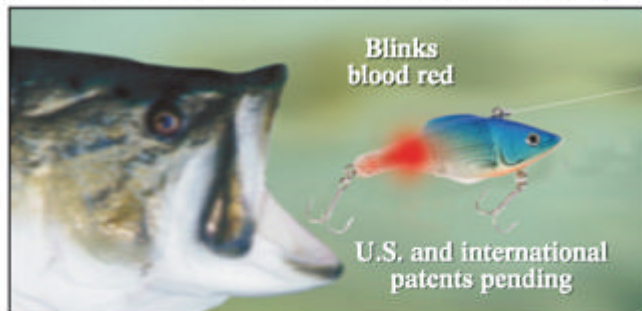
"Predators - lions, sharks," he said, "will always go for the most vulnerable prey. Fish are predators, so if a fish sees a smaller fish bleeding, it knows it's weakened and will strike."

"If a lure could appear to be a live, bleeding fish, a few fishermen could probably empty a lake with it."

I told him three almost did.

Fishes top, middle and deep

There is a U.S. company that offers a kit of three blinking lures (one each for shallow, middle and deep water) called the Bite Light®. Each lure is a different color. They work in fresh or salt water, contain



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SPORTSMAN'S

NOTECBOOK

ICE OFF, 'EYES ON

The secret to scoring monster walleyes right after the thaw is fishing like nothing's melted

By Ross Robertson

Wall-Hanger

The author with a 12-pound early-spring trophy.



SPLIT SHOT

As you scout

spots, run your sonar in split-screen mode, keeping one side zoomed in close to the bottom. Walleyes can hug the lake floor so tightly right after ice-out that they may not register in full-screen mode.



Lucky enough to have open water this month? Trade your shanty for a boat, of course, but fish like the lake is still locked up. Twenty years of walleye experience has taught me that just because the ice is off doesn't mean the fish instantly change their feeding and holding patterns. So park yourself in a good spot, slow down, and pretend it's still February.



POST-THAW GEAR

Must-have tackle for an ice-out attack



[1] HUMMINBIRD ICE 45 With a large LCD display, this unit makes seeing the entire water column easier—which is a plus in open water. The depth and scale adjust automatically, so you'll always know if your lure is in the zone. \$400; humminbird.com



[2] SUNLINE SX1 Small-diameter braided line helps you keep your presentation vertical in all conditions. Ten- or 12-pound-test is strong enough to handle heavy fish but sensitive enough to let you feel any tap or hit on the drop. \$21; sunlineamerica.com



[3] NAVY ANCHOR I've found that a 30-pound Navy anchor works best for holding a big walleye boat on muddy bottoms. A rope that's at least three times the fishing depth ensures a better hold if the wind kicks up or the current is strong. \$55; basspro.com

→ **GET FLASHY** Most anglers don't think to use their ice-fishing electronics in open water, but these are incredibly useful tools right after ice-out. Unlike a fish-finder, a flasher lets you watch your lure, and the fish's reaction to it, in real time. That means you can adjust your presentation and jigging speed until you find out exactly what most fish want.

→ **FEEL IT OUT** Set the hook on any slight tap, as bites can be subtle.

OPENING ACT

Drop heavy metal and play it straight

→ **ANCHORS AWAY** A heavy anchor with 5 feet of coated chain is your best friend at this time of year, because the game is all about staying put in the wind and current and letting walleyes come to you. Like a deer hunter trying to ambush a buck, set up near natural funnels. Deep troughs between islands and the mainland, or steep contour changes near shore, create bottlenecks that

fish and bait move through. Walleyes like to spawn on rocky bottoms that are 3 to 15 feet deep and transition steeply to deep, muddy bottoms. The closer the funnel is to these spawning grounds, the better.

→ **DROP IN** Jigging Raps, Swedish Pimples, and jig-and-minnow combos produce just as well now as they did on the ice, and vertical jigging allows you to

control the speed and action of the lure more effectively than casting and retrieving. Start by holding the rod nearly motionless, letting the bobbing boat impart action. This is often all it takes to trigger fussy fish to bite. If that doesn't work, incrementally increase your jigging speed until you draw a strike. Keep your line as vertical and taut as possible so you can feel the lightest bump.



PROJECTS

SNOW MACHINE

TRICK OUT YOUR 12-GAUGE TO DROP MORE WHITE GEESSE > *By Michael R. Shea*

→ When there are 300 snow geese settling into your spread and 2,000 more circling above, it's great that extended magazines are legal during the spring conservation order. But only if your gun has one. Here's how to choose it and make several other easy tweaks to transform your standard 12-gauge into the ultimate snow goose gun—for less than \$300.



FIG. 01



FIG. 02



FIG. 03



FIG. 04



1 | TUBE TOP-OFF

For every shotgun make and model there are several options, but I went with a plus-six-round Briley shotgun magazine extension (\$95; briley.com) for my Franchi Affinity because it's made well and reasonably priced. The 6061 aluminum is rigid and sturdy but doesn't weigh a ton. You may not always connect on that 10th shot, but you'll feel like a Terminator when you're swinging nearly half a box of shells.

2 | LONG GAME

Snow geese are wary, so plan on long shots. For \$85, Custom Gun Works Inc. will fit your barrel with a Drakekiller choke (drakekiller.com) custom-made to match your gun's exact bore diameter and designed for denser, far-out patterns with waterfowl loads like No. 2s and BBs that will help you drop geese at 50 yards or more. To keep those patterns on target, I topped off my barrel with an extra-bright HiViz CompSight (\$42; hivizsights.com).

3 | WHITE OUT

To take the glare off a blued or polished gun, try Gun Skins from Mossy Oak. These pre-cut vinyl camo kits with matte finishes don't cost much. For snow geese, I recommend the Winter Brush pattern (\$30; mossyOakgraphics.com). To apply it, you'll need an X-Acto knife for trimming, a heat gun or hair dryer for forming the material in recessed areas, and a free afternoon.

4 | GET THE HANG

Don't mount a sling stud at the end of a magazine extension unless you want your 12-gauge to carry like a longbow. Instead, get a Choate Magazine Tube Extension Sling Swivel Base Clamp (\$10; midwayusa.com), which connects barrel to tube above the fore-end, providing a reasonable attachment point and more rigidity to the extended mag. Finish with a quality sling, like the Avery Power Hunter (\$20; averyoutdoors.com), and you're ready to tote your tricked-out snow slayer.



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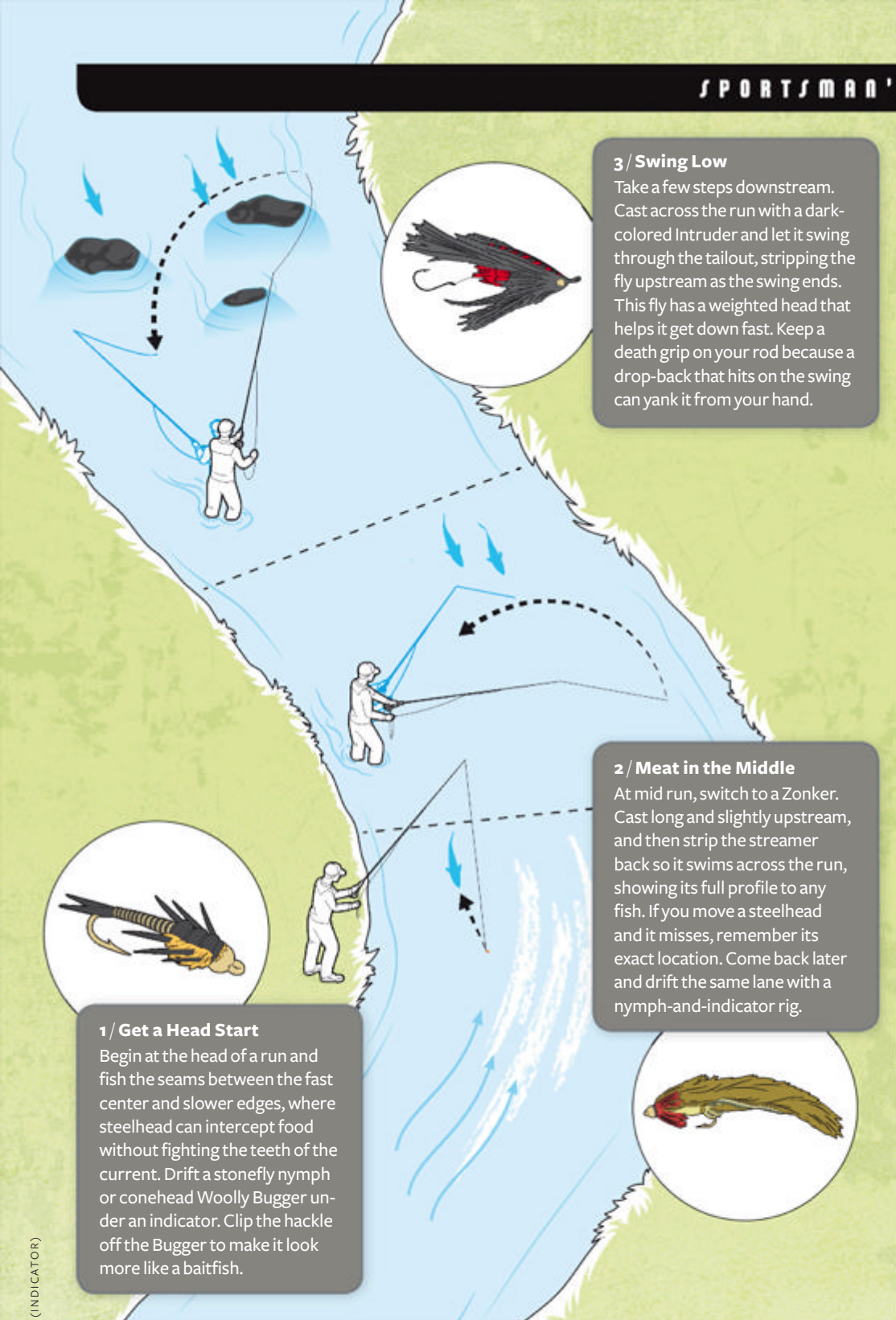


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3 / Swing Low

Take a few steps downstream. Cast across the run with a dark-colored Intruder and let it swing through the tailout, stripping the fly upstream as the swing ends. This fly has a weighted head that helps it get down fast. Keep a death grip on your rod because a drop-back that hits on the swing can yank it from your hand.

2 / Meat in the Middle

At mid run, switch to a Zonker. Cast long and slightly upstream, and then strip the streamer back so it swims across the run, showing its full profile to any fish. If you move a steelhead and it misses, remember its exact location. Come back later and drift the same lane with a nymph-and-indicator rig.

1 / Get a Head Start

Begin at the head of a run and fish the seams between the fast center and slower edges, where steelhead can intercept food without fighting the teeth of the current. Drift a stonefly nymph or conehead Woolly Buzzer under an indicator. Clip the hackle off the Buzzer to make it look more like a baitfish.

TACTICS

DROP-BACK ATTACK

CATCH BIG, HUNGRY STEELHEAD WITHOUT FIGHTING THE CROWDS

By Will Ryan

→ Winter steelheading in Great Lakes tributaries involves icy flows, sluggish feeding, small flies, and big crowds. Spring fishing means big bugs and voracious hits. Success with fish dropping back into the lake now is all about effectively covering a run—which you should have all to yourself this time of year.

Heavy Metal Kit

In the fly department, bigger is better come spring. My favorite streamer is an olive-and-white Zonker with a silver body tied on a 4X long hook. This fly has a meaty baitfish profile that steelies rarely ignore. If you have to go to the bullpen, try a black leech or a conehead Woolly Buzzer in olive, brown, or black. With nymphs, it's tough to beat black or brown stoneflies in sizes 6 through 2. A 6- to 8-weight rod and reel with a smooth drag loaded with floating line will cover most situations. Add split shot to sink flies in runs with shallow to medium depth; loop on a sink tip in the deep stuff.

STRIKE FOR LESS

Make any fly line an indicator line for \$5

Don't want to spend \$75 on an indicator fly line for nymphing? You can make your own for about \$5. Buy a spool of 30-pound Sunset Amnesia shooting line (sunsetlineandtwine.com) in red. Attach a 6- to 12-inch piece of the Amnesia to the end of your fly

line via a nail knot. Next, tie a perfection loop in the tag end of the Amnesia for easy leader connection. The line is superbright and has zero memory, so it won't kink or coil. When the Amnesia stutters during a drift, set the hook.

—Joe Cermelo



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SKILLS

TO-GO TORCH

SPLIT THE WORK OF BUILDING A FIRE FOR CAMP COOKING

> By T. Edward Nickens

→ Some folks call it a Swedish candle; some, a Swedish torch; and others, a Canadian stove. I call it the coolest fire trick ever. A log split into wedges, with tinder jammed into the cracks, throws tall flames for plenty of light, and the flat top makes a great cooking platform for a skillet or Dutch oven. Since the finished torch is pretty portable, do most of the work at home and toss it into your truck or boat. Whether you're Swedish, Canadian, or neither, you'll be seconds from a serious blaze when you blow into camp at zero-dark-thirty.



USER-FRIENDLY FIRE



THE PREP

Select a single round of seasoned firewood that stands upright and level. Split it into even quarters using an ax or hatchet, and then use baling wire to tie the split firewood back together about 6 inches up from the bottom end. Or use a chain saw and cut through the upright log, as if to quarter it, but stop about 6 inches from the bottom (see photo above). Widen the slits to approximately twice the width of the saw blade. Once you reach your destination, set it up in an open, flat area.

THE PYROTECHNICS

Collect finger-thick sticks and tinder material, such as birch bark, dry leaves and grass, or wadded-up newsprint. With the torch standing up, jam half of the sticks into the splits, about a foot from the top of the log. Push half of the dry tinder down on top of that. Then pile the remaining tinder and sticks on the very top. Light the fire here and get cooking. After the initial burn, you can pull apart the wedges to douse the fire, or reposition them into a traditional tepee- or log-cabin-style fire.

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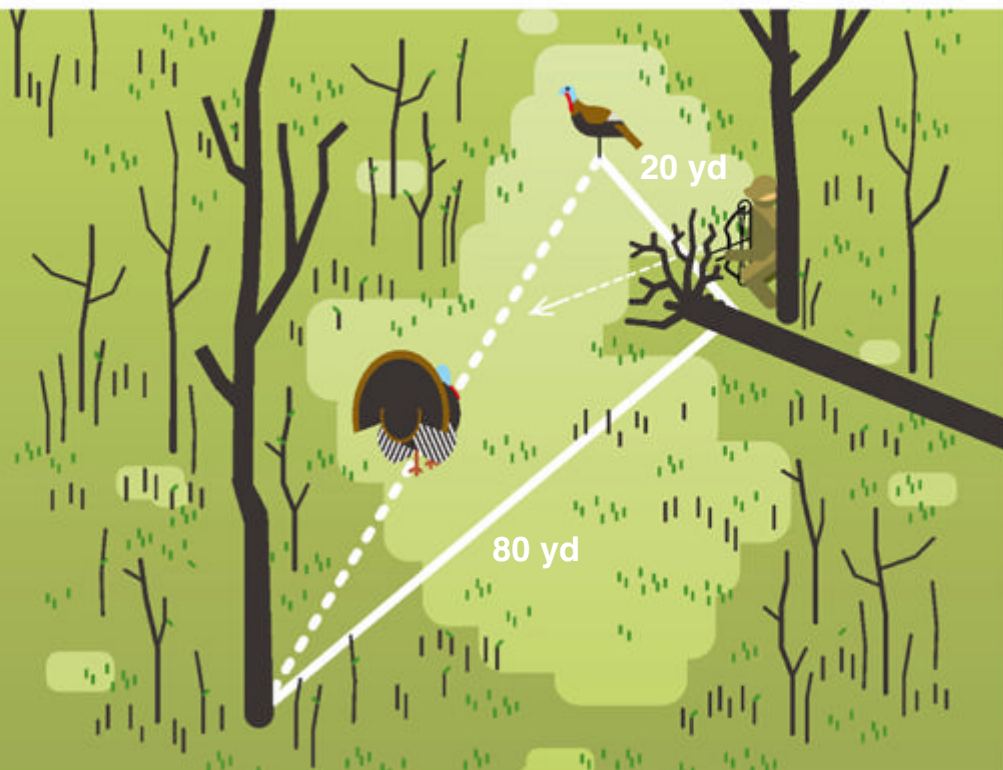
TRIANGULATE
A TOM

GET GEOMETRIC
TO ARROW A
SPRING GOBBLER
WITHOUT A BLIND

> By Michael R. Shea



With a hen decoy, a mouth call, and his bow, upstate New York outfitter Chris Davanzo (fandfoufitters.com) has stuck a pile of longbeards without a ground blind. To draw and shoot undetected, he sets up in a triangle formation. Here's how he does it.

**Ping a Roost**

Before the hunt, Davanzo locates a tom on the roost with an owl call. He selects a spot to set up that is 80 to 100 yards from the bird and has the perfect mix of cover. "Find a good tree to sit against that also has a deadfall, root ball, or wide tree trunk just in front of it to shield you as you draw the bow."

Stake Out

Before first light, Davanzo stakes a hen decoy 10 yards to the right or left of his hide and 20 yards behind, in relation to the roost. A bird's-eye view of the setup looks like a scalene triangle, with the roost, the hunter, and the decoy as the triangle's three points.

Call Him Back

When the tom flies down, Davanzo starts with soft clucks and purrs to get its attention. "Call enough to keep him interested, but not so much that he'll pinpoint your position," he says. When the tom sees the decoy, quit calling unless he starts to walk off.

Duck and Draw

A hot gobbler will head straight to the decoy—and right past you. Once the bird is behind the tree concealing you, draw your bow. "If he spins away from you while strutting, that's another good time to draw," says Davanzo.

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TIPS

THE EARLY-BASS SKINNY

HIT MORE ICE-OUT HAWGS WITH FLAT-SIDED CRANKS > *By Dave Wolak*

→ When the water opens up in March, bass fishermen can't break out the jerkbaits fast enough. Between TV hosts and magazine writers, the idea of jerkbaits being *the* prespawn go-to has been so beaten into anglers' heads, I know guys that refuse to tie on anything else. Not me. Come March, I'm throwing flat-sided crankbaits, because these sleeper lures can trigger more reaction strikes from spring lunkers than any jerkbait—if you know where and how to use them.

Crash Reel
Knocking flat-sided crankbaits off hard cover wakes up early-spring bass.



1 TIGHT VIBES

Compared with thin jerkbaits, flat-sided crankbaits have a taller profile, which produces more flash for fish to spot in spring waters that are often stained or muddy. To increase that flash even more, stick to colors like chartreuse, silver, gold, or crawfish orange. Next to traditional round-body cranks, these lures have a much tighter wobble—extra vibration that goads more strikes now. And while their shape resembles a lipless rattle bait, square-billed flat-sides won't get hung up nearly as often in the hard cover where both shine.

2 BANG ON

Early-spring bass gravitate to deep water surrounded by the shallows they'll need for spawning. Creek channels or ditches running through flats are prime, especially if they feature submerged wood or rocks. To draw strikes, you need to bang the hard stuff. When my flat-side knocks off the hard stuff, I instantly pause. Bass key on the lure's vibration and are triggered by the abrupt stop. Unlike lipless rattle baits, a flat-side will hang in position during that pause, which is often when a sluggish monster will make its move.



→ THIN IS IN

One reason flat-sided cranks fly under the radar is because early production models, commonly made of light balsa wood, were

difficult to cast any distance, and fishing them effectively meant using light spinning gear. But flat-sides have come a long way in the last five years.

New models like the Jackall Bling 55 (above, \$16; jackall-lures.com) have internal weight-transfer systems for easier casting and internal

rattles for sound. A wide range of bill sizes and buoyancies now lets you tailor your lure to whichever type of rod and reel you like to fish.



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BY JOE CERMELE



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1. Wet Wading

A soggy day on Fishing Creek in Pennsylvania.



2. Dance Floor

A jig slow-hopped on the bottom scored this Minnesota bass.

You're over drilling ice holes. You've tied enough flies to last a season. Your tackle has never been more organized. Each drop of melting snow dripping from the gutter gets you more amped for your triumphant return to open-water fishing on the river or lake. Problem is, depending on where you live, that open water is likely to be high, cold, or dirty—or all three. Runoff, thawing ice, and early-spring rains can make any water extremely difficult to fish, but they can also offer big advantages. In fact, these pros would wager that if you can just tough it out, that bone-chilling chocolate milk could produce your biggest pike, bass, trout, walleyes, and crappies of the season. Here are their strategies to find and catch March monsters.

TROUT: EMBRACE THE HIGH RISE

1

PRO
Gary Edwards
vacationsonthefly.com

HOME WATER
Fishing Creek,
Pennsylvania

BIO
Edwards has been a guide for 35 years, working in Wyoming, Colorado, New York, and Pennsylvania.

ESSENTIAL FLY
Maciag's Yarn Worm

Find Them

"When a trout river is high and dirty, fishing slow breaks, seams, and eddies behind structure or near the bank is obvious," Edwards says, "but what if runoff is so bad there's no bank left? That has never scared me. I've fished a lot of flooded woods and cornfields. Water running over land is shallow, so it warms faster. When a river spills onto land, it has to run back into the main body again somewhere. Find that spot. Trout will stack at the mouth of a floodwater confluence, because that flow will bring worms and baitfish right to them, and that spot will be a little less frigid than the rest of the river."

Catch Them

"When the going gets tough, I use a 4-inch worm fly invented by my friend George Maciag," Edwards says. "It's made of strands of needlepoint yarn, and it has a heavy epoxy head. The hook is positioned at the worm's tail. Unlike a San Juan worm, this fly gets down fast and has action more like a big streamer. I high-stick it, keeping it bouncing across the bottom through any slow current or slack-water zones where I think a trout might be taking refuge. There will be no doubt in your mind when it gets hit. Big trout hammer it."



SMALLMOUTHS: PUT OUT THE VIBE

2

PRO
John Blais
belgradebassin.com

HOME WATER
Belgrade Lakes,
Maine

BIO
Blais has been chasing smallmouths on the Belgrade Lakes chain for 30 years and guiding full-time for the last 12.

ESSENTIAL LURE
Silver Buddy Blade Bait

Find Them

"On our lakes, we're not dealing with high or dirty water right after ice-out as much as cold water. It will be in the 38- to 42-degree range. I think anglers have a misconception that cold water is tough, but we routinely have 40- to 100-fish days this time of year, and the fish are at their heaviest. The most challenging part is finding them, but once you do, they'll eat. I focus on steep dropoffs that transition to shallow areas where the bass will spawn as the water warms. These areas are typically located at the ends or along the sides of points that jut into the lake."

Catch Them

"A Silver Buddy blade bait is hands down the best lure for this period," Blais says. "I don't really care what color it is, because it's the vibration it makes that draws the strike. Once I find the fish stacked up, I'll sit right on top of them and work the lure slowly over the bottom. Just reel enough to pick up the slack, and give the lure occasional twitches to make it hop off the bottom and vibrate. One thing to note is that you need a fast rod to get the right action. A soft, wimpy rod won't give the lure the same snap."



LARGEMOUTHS: GET SOME CLARITY

3

PRO
Pete Gluszek
petegluszek.com

HOME WATER
Upper Chesapeake
Bay, Maryland

BIO
Gluszek has been a
touring bass pro for
20 years and a guide
for the last 10.

**ESSENTIAL
LURE**
**Buckeye
Lures Mop Jig**

Find Them

"The most important thing when the water is up and dirty is finding cleaner water," Gluszek says. "It doesn't have to be crystal clear, but even a little more clarity than the main body goes a long way. If the banks flood, the water that covers the normal bank usually has better visibility. It's also where the baitfish are going to go, and the bass will follow. Get as far into the flooded areas as you can and fish the new bank, which is wherever the water stops. Focus on hard structure, like wood or rock in these areas, as they'll provide the best holding points for bass."

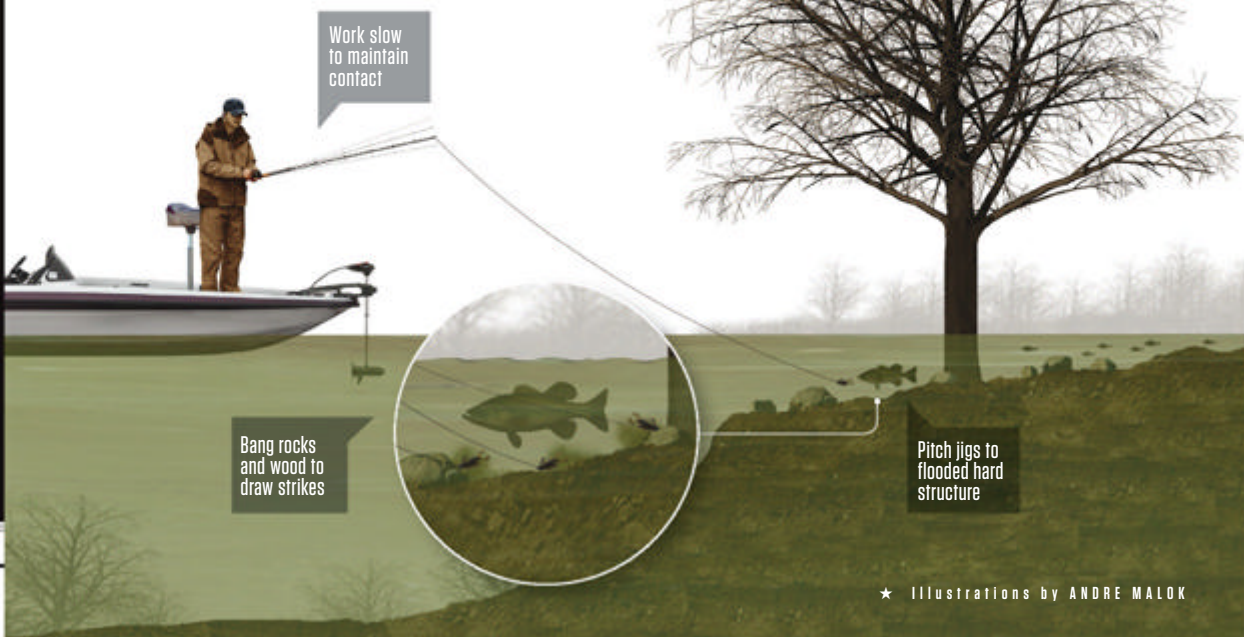
Catch Them

"When the water is dirty, bottom contact is very important," Gluszek says. "I tie on a heavy Buckeye Mop Jig as big as my hand in a dark color, which seems to stand out better in muddy water. I'll coat the jig with Smelly Jelly, add rattles, use a 5-inch crawfish trailer—whatever I can do to make it as noticeable as possible. As I bring the jig back to the boat, I want it clacking and knocking off of any wood or rocks out there. The more noise it makes, the more you'll get bit."



ROB THE FLOOD BANK

Move in as close as possible to the "new bank" created by early-spring flooding.



WALLEYES: TAKE IT TO THE RIVER

4

PRO
Joe Okada
joeokada.com

HOME WATER
Green Bay, Wisconsin

BIO
Okada is a touring
walleye pro who spe-
cializes in catching
trophy in everything
from huge lakes to
small rivers.

**ESSENTIAL
LURE**
**Rapala
Countdown
Minnow**

Find Them

"Walleyes run up rivers in fall," Okada says. "This is where they winter over, and in early spring their location offers anglers without boats the best shot at prespawn giants. Most rivers have known spots, like slack holes below dams that get pounded, but if you're willing to hunt, you can find less pressured fish. Also, the higher the water, the more the walleyes will gravitate to shallow runs, and this time of year they can sit really skinny. Focus on areas of slower current near confluences of smaller creeks, or eddies behind small wingdams."

Catch Them

"What's different about fishing rivers early in the season is that you can get away with one small box of lures and a pair of waders instead of five trolling rods and 10 tackle bags," Okada says. "But if there's one thing you need in that box, it's a No. 7 Rapala Countdown Minnow in chartreuse. You want a color that stands out. These lures also have a heavier lip than similar baits, which helps them dig more quickly in current. I've always found a slow, steady retrieve most productive."





3. Lone Star Lunker
An early-spring Texas hog from Lake Fork.

BITE THE BULLET



When the water's really high, I pass on split shot to get my streamers and spinners deep and carry an assortment of bullet weights. When you need to punch through heavy current—or stay in the sweet spot—peg a bullet weight just ahead of your Rooster Tail or Zonker. These hydrodynamic weights nosedive faster than shot and won't hurt lure or fly action. —J.C.



4. 'Eye Dropper
A trophy Saskatchewan walleye ready for release.

SMEAR TACTIC



I don't really like putting attractants on my lures. About the only time I use them is early in spring when the conditions are nasty, because anything you can do to make a lure stand out is helpful.

I avoid sprays, liquids, and dips, and instead use FishSticks Lure Enhancer (\$11; fishstickslureenhancer.com), which comes in a tube like Chapstick. It rolls on, doesn't melt, and won't ever funk up your tackle bag, car seat, or boat deck. —J.C.



5. Wood Working
An Arkansas slab caught over submerged trees.

BE A BLADE RUNNER



Early in the season when the water is stained, a simple spinner blade can really save the day. Try replacing the rear hook of your jerkbait or crankbait with a spinner blade on a barrel swivel. You can also slide a spinner blade and clevis (the kind used to make walleye worm rigs) ahead of your streamer flies. Yeah, it's dirty, but so is the water, and the extra flash and vibration can mean the difference between playing fish and playing in the mud. —J.C.

6. The Big Skinny
A heavy pike from the shallows of Minnesota's Gull Lake.



BILL LINDNER (2)

CRAPPIES: INVAD THE TREE HOUSE

5

PRO
Kyle Schoenherr
allseasonscrappie
fishing.com

HOME WATER
Rend Lake, Illinois

BIO
A Crappie Masters pro, Schoenherr has been fishing Rend since he was a kid.

ESSENTIAL LURE
Road Runner-Glow Tube Combination

Find Them

"In early spring, finding fish is less about water temperature and more about clarity. The muddier the water, the shallower the fish hold. This time of year, I'm trying to intercept big prespawn fish as they transition to the spawning grounds. I typically find them over wood, flooded timber, or riprap 5 to 10 feet deep at the mouths of bays. Thing is, a spot that's hot today might be dead tomorrow because the fish are moving, so be prepared to hunt."

Catch Them

"Good electronics are key," Schoenherr says, "because you need a clear picture of exactly where the fish are holding on the structure. Once I have that, I'll use the trolling motor to hold me in position directly over them for vertical jigging. When the water is dirty, I lean on a Road Runner jighead tipped with a 2-inch glow-in-the-dark tube. I've done a lot of testing with glow baits, and you'd be surprised what a huge difference they can make in drawing strikes compared to non-glowing tubes when the visibility is low. Because you can quickly change depth, I use jigs more often than live bait in March."



PLAY THE LONG GAME

Schoenherr uses 12-foot spinning rods to extend his reach while keeping jigs presented vertically.



Glow-in-the-dark tubes up visibility

Hold position with the trolling motor

Short hops keep the jig in the zone

NORTHERN PIKE: GO SPOON BENDING

6

PRO
Patrick Babcock
creeveriverlodge.ca

HOME WATER
Wapata Lake, Saskatchewan

BIO
Babcock owns Cree River Lodge and has been guiding for pike since he was 14.

ESSENTIAL LURE
Len Thompson Spoon

Find Them

"As soon as the ice comes off, the pike will gravitate to shallow, sandy, or muddy bays," Babcock says. "These flats are usually a few degrees warmer than the main lake, and the pike need that warmth to speed up their metabolism. We're lucky, because while the water is high in the beginning of the season, it's very clear, which actually makes early spring the best time to sight-fish. Once all the water in the lake warms up, these fish will move to the weedbeds and become more difficult to pinpoint."

Catch Them

"How pike react to lures at this time of year can vary from day to day depending on the water temperature and weather," Babcock says. "Sometimes you need to retrieve slowly because the fish are cold and don't want to move far or fast. The next day, they'll charge a lure that's ripping. But as a general rule, I like to cast 15 to 20 feet past the fish I'm trying to catch and start with a fast retrieve. I'll stop the lure just as it reaches the pike, and then pick up the speed again. My go-to lure would be a Len Thompson Spoon, size 2 in black and yellow."



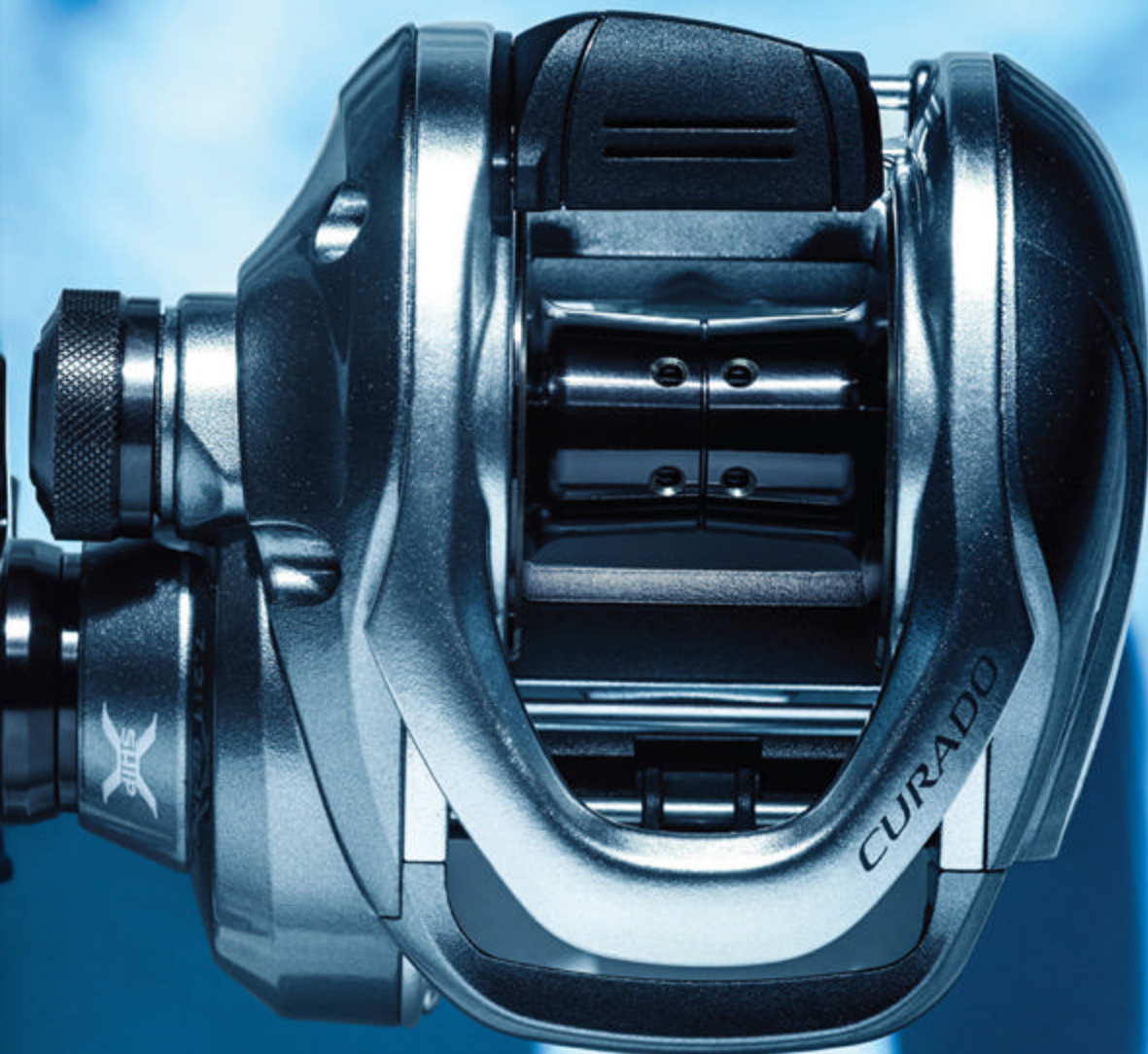
FIELD & STREAM

2015

OF THE

best

FROM A TUMULTUOUS TOPWATER LURE TO A
STEAL OF A FLY REEL TO A TACKLE BAG THAT
CLOSES ITSELF, THIS FISHING GEAR IS THE
YEAR'S FINEST →



Shimano
Curado 200 I HG
\$180

● The Curado is a great performer and an excellent value. If you're looking for bells and whistles, you won't find them here. This reel is just a workhorse that fit well in my hands, was easy to dial in, and threw out fewer backlashes than any other model I tested. It's supersmooth, whether line is going on or off the spool during a cast or retrieve—or if a nice bass is pulling a little drag. —Joe Cermele

F I S H I N G

Photographs by TRAVIS RATHBONE



**L.L. Bean
Kennebec
Boundary Pack**
\$129

• Though L.L. Bean calls this a chest pack, it's really a hybrid that incor-

porates the best features of a chest pack and a fishing vest. It zips up front like a vest, but in a unique twist, it tightens down with a Boa closure at each side. The result is a comfortable, close-fitting

pack-vest with superb stability for hiking, for bushwhacking, and especially for wading heavy water, where a conventional vest can shift and disrupt your balance.

—Ted Leeson



**Cabela's +
Icebreaker
Thermal Zone
Half-Zip Top
and Bottoms**
\$150 each

• Cabela's has partnered with the New Zealand merino experts at Icebreaker to produce these distinctly useful base-layer pieces. The thermal-zone design puts wool of different weights in different areas of the body, based on the need for heat retention. The approach keeps you toasty while minimizing weight and maximizing mobility. It's ideal for anglers who work up a sweat; the lighter fabric in the armpits and crotch let heat disperse. —T.L.



**Jackall
Pompadour**
\$23

• The Pompadour has to be the loudest, most obnoxious topwater I've ever thrown. Large metal wings splay wide during the retrieve to amp up the sound as this innovative bait chugs across the surface. A rear prop adds to the noise pollution that's so over the top, I'd bet a hawg bass 10 miles away would hear it. —J.C.

CLIFF GARDINER & JOHN KELLER (ALL PRODUCTS ON WHITE)



Cabela's Verano \$150

• A collaborative effort between Cabela's and Daiwa, the Verano kind of caught me off guard.

Smart, modern features like a rear tapering spool that thwarts tangles and a waterproof drag are often found on high-end reels, yet the Verano is very affordable. During testing,

it proved just as smooth and light as some high-priced competitors. Don't be surprised if this inexpensive little tank becomes your next go-to spinning reel. —J.C.

Simms Dry Creek Boat Bag \$230

• With an RF-welded chassis, semirigid sides, and padded dividers, this 33-liter waterproof bag offers rugged gear protection, but there's a catch—a unique magnetic one that docks itself and clicks shut when you drop the lid. Contents are shielded from the elements, and you can pick the bag up by the top handle without closing the lid zipper. And you can open the latch with one hand, making for unparalleled speed and convenience of access. —T.L.



St. Croix Avid X \$200

• The Avid X series includes nine casting models, my favorite being the medium-power 7-footer. Whether I was cranking or dragging Senkos, this rod was incredibly sensitive and comfortable to fish. It weighs next to nothing, and the innovative tapering of the guide heights up the blank allows you to zing any lure a country mile. Best of all, you get St. Croix quality at a sweet price. —J.C.





Waterworks-Lamson Liquid 2 Reel

\$100

• The Liquid admirably demonstrates what can be achieved these days with a high-quality pressure-cast process. The frame and spool castings are sharp, clean, and attractive. Subsequent machining of critical areas gives a tight mechanical fit, precision, and trueness of rotation to rival many bar-stock reels. More impressive still, the Liquid is built with the same conical drag components that Waterworks-Lamson uses in its considerably more expensive models—among the best trout-reel drags going. —T.L.



Sage Salt 890-4 Fly Rod

\$850

• Flats fishing often demands quickly executed and, above all, accurate shots between 25 and 75 feet. The Salt loads easily for shorter-distance presentations

and for lifting the line head into a single back cast, shooting to the target, and putting your fly on the money. In good hands, the Salt has plenty of reach, but it's not a top choice for firing to the horizon. What you get instead is more useful: very fine presentations. —T.L.

Umpqua Tail-gater Organizer

\$80

• Many anglers these days use a lidded plastic tub, like a Rubbermaid Roughneck, to transport waders and wet gear. Umpqua has expanded the utility of this setup with the Tail-gater, a pair of saddle-bag storage panels that



straddle the front and back of a tub. It creates an efficient rigging station in a vehicle or a base of operations for surf fishing. So simple it's brilliant. —T.L.

Hatch Nomad Pliers

\$280

• A superbly made tool, the Nomad has I-beam arms fashioned from Type II anodized 6061-T6 aluminum alloy for excellent tensile strength, rigidity, and corrosion resistance in a nice and light 4-ounce package. The jaws handle both heavy work and finer tasks, and the tungsten carbide cutters slice through anything from 7X tippet to 100-pound shock tippet with the same clean ease. Both jaws and cutter blades are factory replaceable, and it's guaranteed for life. It's the last pair of pliers you'll ever have to buy. —T.L.



Simms G4 Pro Jacket

\$550

• This latest version of the Simms G-series jacket not only shaves 15 percent of the weight but improves abrasion resistance and tear strength. This is killer rainwear with a supple, lightweight feel; easy arm mobility for casting and rowing; and excellent breathability. The revamped hood and cuffs draw down snugly to seal out the elements. A good wading jacket shields you from the rain; a great one like this protects you from the weather. —T.L.



Yeti Rambler Tumbler

\$25–\$35

• I know what you're thinking: How good can a travel cup possibly be? All I can tell you is that Yeti doesn't make anything that isn't designed and built extremely well. Once you've left the house at 5 A.M. and are still sipping hot coffee on the boat at 9 A.M., you'll understand why I can't live without mine. —J.C.

Sébile Action First Bull Minnow

\$8

• With an external weight positioned low on the body and an overall girth that's fatter than your average jerkbait, the Bull Minnow has a sexy rolling wobble that's unique for this class of lures. A big internal mass-transfer bead provides extra casting distance and a loud knock at any retrieve speed, making it a versatile bait that belongs in everything from your smallmouth box to your saltwater striper box. —J.C.



StreamTrekkers by IceTrek

\$42

• I've tried several brands of slip-on wading grippers and found most of them don't stay put or offer the same nonslip confidence of screw-in studs. StreamTrekkers bucked that trend. They strap over any boots easily and won't shift. Thanks to steel-alloy Diamond Beads that grab from all angles, they'll keep you glued to rocks even tighter than permanent studs. —J.C.



GoPro Sportsman Mount

\$70

• Before the Sportsman Mount, I was strapping GoPro cameras to rails and gaffs with handlebar mounts and duct tape. Not only does the Sportsman Mount lock down tight on just about anything, but it comes off in seconds when needed elsewhere. —J.C.





Umpqua Steamboat Sling

\$120

• The Steamboat raises sling packs to a new level of sophistication. This

symmetrical pack rides centered along your spine, and the comfortable straps keep it in place for a balanced, nonshifting load. The 900-cubic-inch capacity can hold a heap of stuff,

organized in three zippered compartments, each with interior sleeves and pockets, eliminating that tossed-in-a-gunnysack jumble common with sling packs. —T.L.



Fishpond Sushi Roll

\$30

• I'm a big-streamer junkie. Thing is, large streamer boxes take up a lot of room. The foam Sushi Roll lets me carry just as many monster bugs as a hard case, but I can tuck them away in a sling pack or drift-boat compartment. Foam teeth along the edges create separation, letting air pass through to dry your flies when the Sushi Roll is all rolled up. Ingenious. —J.C.

Fenwick Elite Tech Bass

\$150

• Fenwick put just as much R&D into its new bass-specific rods as other brands. The difference is that you can afford the Elite Tech. I particularly liked the spinning rods, which were light and sensitive enough to keep contact with a tube in heavy smallmouth water but had the backbone to steer big fish out of fast current. As a bonus, the hidden handle, made of EVA and TAC, is a lot more comfortable to grip than reel-seat threads. —J.C. **FS**



F&S
TURKEY
CLINIC

READY TO BUST OUT SOME
WILD HEN TALK THIS SPRING?
WE TAPPED THREE CHAMPION
TURKEY CALLERS TO REVEAL
THEIR TRICKS—IN THEIR OWN
WORDS, ONE CALL AT A TIME—
FOR MAKING LATEX, STONE,
GLASS, AND WOOD SOUND
EXACTLY LIKE THE REAL THING
BY DAVE HURTEAU

LET HER RIP!



DONALD M. JONES



Mitchell Johnston



Mouth Off A Michigan hunter talks turkey. Above, Dead End Game Call's Roadkill Batwing 2.

THE CHAMP: Mitchell Johnston

Owner of Dead End Game Calls (deadendgamecalls.com)

MAJOR WINS: 2010 NWTF Grand National; 2010 World Two-Man; 2009 World Friction; 2014 and 2012 North Carolina State Friction; 2014 NC State Owl Hooting; 2012 NC State Tarheel Open

CALL: Mouth call

YELP

When a real hen yelps, she opens and closes her mouth with each note. I started out saying *yelp* into the call because that *p* ending made me open and close my mouth like the real deal. I don't really say any particular word anymore, but that's a great place to start.

You want a clear, high-pitched front note—*yee*—and a lower, raspy end note—*elp*. With most calls, you damp down the front part of the reed with your tongue and run air over the back center to get the high note. On a batwing, which I like, you run the air on the back right of the call. Then you just drop your jaw for that raspy *elp*.

CUTT

Most guys think of cutting as excited clucking. But on a mouth call, they are two different beasts. To cluck, you gather air in your mouth and just barely let it out [see next section]. To cutt, you want to drive air straight through the center of the call, saying *tick*. Don't use your lips—it's all tongue. And say it sharp. Stay away from "machine-gun cutting." That might be the biggest mistake people make. Hens almost always cutt one, two, or three notes at a time: *tick, tick-tick, tick, tick-tick-tick, tick-tick, tick*. Mix it up.

CLUCK AND PURR

The trick to making realistic clucks is getting that bubbly sound. Close your lips and

fill your mouth, and your cheeks a little, with air. Now slowly push that air forward and let it out by softly popping your lips: *puht*. It's like the sound of bubbles popping.

A lot of guys can't purr on a mouth call. Ninety percent of the trouble is the call. I recommend a light-latex double-reed. You can use some triple-reeds, but it's really tough on a quad. Also, everyone thinks you need to roll the very tip of your tongue, but that makes it hard to get any sound. Instead, create back pressure by filling your mouth with air and pushing it forward. Then let it go as you flutter your tongue a little bit back from the tip, where it contacts the reeds. Keep your mouth and lips really loose, which creates even more vibration. And don't overdo it. Real turkey purrs are quite short.

DO-WHIT

This is a little three-note whistle that content turkeys mix in when they're clucking and purring, and it adds a lot of realism to your soft talk. Do the same thing you would to get the high note of a yelp, but quieter. Then softly say *whit-too-whit* into the call. The *whits* are fast, and the *too* is drawn out. Just do it over and over until it sounds like a hen.

WATCH VIDEO

Johnston used to listen to other callers, but it wasn't until he started listening to turkeys that he got really good. "The easiest way to do it is on YouTube. It's a great tool. Just search 'wild turkeys calling' and watch as many different clips as you can."

THE CHAMP: Sadler McGraw

Owner of Champions Choice Calls (on Facebook)

MAJOR WINS: 2014 World Two-Man; 2014 Grand National Locator; 2013 World Locator; 2012 World Turkey Calling; 2009 Grand National Friction; 2008 World Friction; 2007 U.S. Open Friction and more

CALL: Pot call

YELP

A lot of guys draw circles with the striker to make a yelp—and don't get me wrong, that'll kill turkeys—but it sounds like *wow, wow, wow*. You want *yee-ow, yee-ow, yee-ow*, which is more realistic. To get that, draw the shape of a small hook—like a bream hook. Start at about 1 o'clock near the top of the sweet circle [see sidebar below] and move the striker right-to-left to make the hook shank. Then come down a little and around to finish off the hook. Just don't come too far into the middle of the call.

CLUCK, CUTT, AND CACKLE

If you can cluck, you can make all three. So let's start there. Put the tip of the striker in the same place, and give it a little downward pressure. Then just pull toward you until it pops off. It's like striking a match. To cutt, apply a little more pressure for a louder, sharper sound, and string the clucks together. To cackle, start with a few normal clucks, and then run eight or 10 together real quick, and end with a few more regular clucks. When I pick up the speed for the excited cutts and cackle, I drop my third finger off the striker. It opens up the sound so it really pops.

CLUCK AND PURR

Finger pressure is key for soft talk. If you hold the striker too tight or press too hard, the sound will be loud and sharp. I change my grip [see sidebar at right] so that the striker just kind of flops in my hand; that's how you get that light, bubbly sound. I also lay the right edge of the pot against my leg, and cup my hand around the bottom of the pot. Then I open and close my hand to vary the sound and volume.

Cluck the same way, just softer. To purr, make a very small letter C, using mostly your fingers to move the striker. You can mix the sound up a little by drawing a tall C or a squat one, or even coming straight down the call.

TREE YELP

I love to get close to the roost, and for that, a tree yelp is deadly. It's easy to do, too. Just make small circles with light finger pressure. You don't need that big two-note yelp here. Keep it simple and soft. I used to listen to a Ben Rogers Lee LP, where he said: "If a man can hear you tree call from 30 yards, you're doing it too loud." Don't worry, the turkeys can hear it—and it really works.



GET TWO GRIPS

McGraw's Standard Grip:

Pinch the striker with your thumb and first finger (above). Lay your middle finger beside the first. Then wrap your third finger under the striker, so the top side of the finger contacts the peg.

His Soft-Talk Grip:

Pinch with pointer and thumb about halfway up the striker, so it flops a little. Then wrap your middle finger under the striker.

With both, hold the pot up in your fingertips, and rest the meaty edge of your striker hand on the call.

PLAY THE CIRCLE

The very edge of a pot call is too high pitched, and the middle sounds dead. In between is what McGraw calls the sweet circle, a $\frac{3}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick band all around the call. Always keep your striker in it.



Girl Talk
An Eastern hen yelps in a trio of puffed-up suitors.





Out of the Box
A Montana hunter sits up for some loud open-country yelping.

TRY A TURN

Below is Strawser's basic hold. "If you can't do it this way, try just turning the box around—so the handle faces away," he says. He also cuts down or removes the call's spring (surrounding the screw) to help open up the sound.



THE CHAMP: Pat Strawser

Owner of Pat Strawser Custom Calls (on Facebook)

MAJOR WINS: 2014 Grand National Friction; 2007, 2005, 1999 Master's Invitational; 1997 U.S. Open Friction; 1996 U.S. Open Owl; 2009 Pennsylvania State Champion; numerous call-making wins, including 2008 and 2007 D.D. Adams Award

CALL: Box call

YELP

All you need to do with a box call to make perfect two-note yelps is hold the call and run the lid. But a lot of guys don't take the lid out far enough or they pick the lid up off the call. With the box closed, let's say the lid's handle points at 6 o'clock. Open it to 4 o'clock to get plenty of that first, high note. Now rock the lid slightly so the left edge angles down as you come into the sidewall. It's like leaning into that first note—*YEE*. Then just relax your grip as you come straight across, and the low note will be there. Close the box completely to end the first yelp, but don't lift the lid to start the next. Go straight back out to 4 o'clock and do it again.

CUTT

Cutting can be so realistic on a box call, but not if you're just picking up the lid and slamming it down into the call, like a lot of guys do. Instead, you want to tilt the right side of the

box 45 degrees toward the floor, open the lid to 4 o'clock again, and lay it down on the sidewall. Now, using only your index finger on the right edge of the handle, pop the lid up like you're pulling a trigger. Pop it, let gravity drop it back down, and pop it again. Each



cluck should sound round and bubbly—like the clucks of a real turkey. When you slam the lid down, it sounds more like a woodpecker rapping on a tree. Don't worry about being able to cutt fast at first. Just get that good sound, and the speed will come.

CLUCK AND PURR

Use the exact same mechanics for plain clucks, but don't open the call quite so far or pull the trigger as hard. I can purr on a box call, but it sounds like a guy purring on a box call. If you want to do a really good cluck-and-purr combo, put the box call away and grab your mouth call or pot.

KEE KEE

A long box is perfect here because it gives you more of the high note. When real turkeys kee, the notes climb—*kee, kee, kee*. To get that, you open the lid to the left and make short strokes from 8:30 to 8, then 8 to 7:30, and finally 7:30 to 7, which makes the lid's contact point climb the slope of the curved sidewall. The whole time, you want to push the lid toward the screw, which is why I kee on the left side; it makes the pushing motion easier and more consistent. That tension combined with the climbing notes gives you the shrill, pleading, increasingly desperate sound you're after.

A full-page photograph of a man with a beard and a grey beanie, wearing a dark jacket and brown waders, sitting in a grey aluminum boat. He is holding a wooden oar. The boat is on a river with a forested background. The word "CHASING" is printed in large white letters across the middle of the image.

CHASING

→ When the steelhead are running, nothing else matters to Mikey Dvorak.

Not money, not manners, not even where he's going to sleep at night. What matters is finding a biting steelie somewhere, anywhere, on the West Coast. We went along for the ride



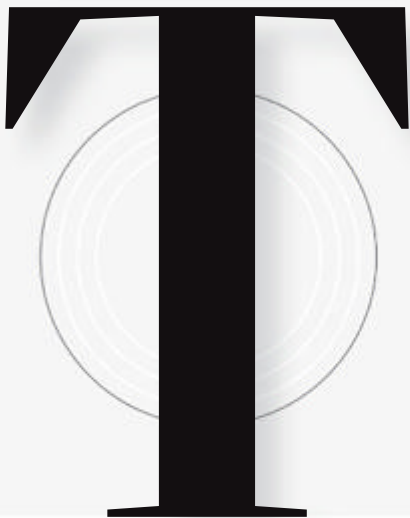
the CHROME

By Bill Heavey

Photographs by Ian Allen

F&S ADVENTURE

Steelie Gaze
Dvorak rows his
drift boat on
California's Smith
River.



→ THE FIRST TIME I met Mikey Dvorak, he asked if he could borrow fifty bucks.

At the time I thought he was a bum. I still think he's a bum, but in the same way that an itinerant Buddhist monk is a bum. Except Mikey's spiritual path was chasing steelhead.

I met Mikey through Kirk Lombard, a hardcore angler in San Francisco, who told me that if I really wanted to meet a "true fishing nomad" I should meet Mikey, a steelhead addict who had no fixed address and never seemed to have more than a few bucks on him. But it didn't seem to bother him. "All he cares about is being where the fish are," Kirk said. That's why Mikey often slept in his truck—not on a pad in the back so he could stretch out, but upright in the driver's seat because the rest of the truck was too full of gear. "And he's such a maniac that he sleeps on the ramp."

"I'm afraid I don't follow."

"When Mikey's steelhead fishing, he wants to be the first guy on the river. So, the night before, he backs his drift boat down the ramp, puts the truck in park, and conks out. The next morning, the first guy at the ramp finds Mikey there. The guy is pissed and bangs on Mikey's window to wake him up. At which point Mikey wakes, apologizes, and launches. So he's on the river ahead of anybody else."

I had to meet this guy.

A few days later the three of us headed down the California coast to chase white sea-bass, a highly mobile fish that migrates up from Baja California as the ocean warms in spring. We hoped to intercept some around Monterey. I dug myself a hole in the backseat of Mikey's truck, which was crammed to the roof with fishing and camping gear, as well as a great deal of stuff that should have been in a landfill. Mikey said that the police had re-



“
PUT MIKEY
AROUND A
FISH AND HE
BECAME
FOCUSED,
INTENT, AND
TIRELESS.”



cently stopped him on this very stretch of road because his truck fit the profile of a meth user's vehicle. The cops had searched it thoroughly. Actually, Mikey said, the stop had been a good thing. The cops turned up tackle that he'd given up for lost.

I was already captivated by the guy. He named every bird we saw at surprising distances, and when I asked how, he explained that he was doing it by the birds' flight characteristics, which were generally more distinctive than markings. He talked about all kinds of fish, their life cycles, what biologists knew and what they still hadn't figured out.

It was just outside Monterey that he asked for the fifty bucks. I gave him the money, but I also pointed out that I was leaving in three days and asked how he proposed to pay me back. "No problem," he said. "I just need a battery for the boat."

"You're losing me, Mikey."

"Oh, right," he said, as if the connection was so obvious that he hadn't bothered to explain. "We need the battery. So we buy one, fish for two days, and then return it for the refund." In my world, owning a motorboat implied that you also owned the battery needed to start the motor. In Mikey's world, I soon realized, only the present mattered. The past was done, the future abstract. If you live in the moment and care about fishing, there are only two important questions. Where are the fish? What do I need to go fishing for them right now?

In a way, I admired that Mikey had freed himself from the unproductive worries that so often kept me, like most people, from being fully present in the moment. Mikey, Kirk had said, was a barely legal walking disaster in the real world. He had a cellphone only because his sister, frustrated at never knowing where he was, bought him one. He forgot things, lost things, routinely showed up late or not at all, and failed to follow through on promises. But put him around a fish and he became focused, intent, and tireless.

For the next two days, the three of us and our new battery bobbed around on 6-foot swells in the Pacific in a 14-foot skiff, jiggling our brains out. The only other boats we saw were tankers and container ships on the horizon. Just half a mile away, waves that had traveled thousands of miles across the ocean hurtled against the coastal cliffs with thunderous claps. At some point I realized that

we had nothing but life jackets if anything were to happen. And no safe beach to swim to. I didn't want to think about this too hard, so I asked Mikey what it was about steelhead for

him. He shrugged, as if to say that the answer was ineffable, but he gave it a try. "They're the most mysterious, smartest, toughest fish I've ever seen."

"Think about it. A steelhead gets born in a particular patch of gravel in the river, spends a couple of years growing, and then decides to head down to the ocean. Which is not a safe place for a smolt. Everything out there wants to eat it. It spends a couple of years fattening up at sea, maybe swims halfway around the world. Then—if it's the one or two fish in a hundred that makes it—it'll beat its brains out to return to the same patch of gravel. To the same square foot of gravel, you know? Amazing. And you don't know when or if they're gonna show up. They're just really tough, smart fish."

Over the years, he'd had steelhead strike so viciously that they yanked rods out of the holders on his drift boat. "Three times that's happened. Right outta something designed to hold your rod no matter what. And they were good outfits—\$500 ones, Loomis and Lamiglas rods with Shimano Calcutta reels. How can you not love a fish that wild, with that much heart?"

We fished hard for two whole days and never got a bite. By the time I left, however, I'd vowed that if I ever got the chance to go steelheading with Mikey Dvorak, I'd jump on it. The season along the California coast usually ran from late December or January through March, he said. It all hinged on getting enough rain to raise the rivers so the fish could get over the bar and swim up.

The call came two years later.

+ Hot Pursuit

It had been an unusually dry year, Mikey told me, but the rains had finally come in mid February. The fishing was fantastic.

By the time I booked a flight, however, there had been too much of a good thing. The rivers were unfishable—high, fast, and muddy. I delayed my departure a week. A week later, as I was checking in at the airport, Mikey called again to ask if I could delay for two more days. I couldn't.

"What the hell," he said. "We'll just have to do the best we can."

I was standing outside baggage claim at the San Jose airport when he drove up. There's something about guys like Mikey that threatens certain types of people. I could see every cop within sight eyeballing the truck, driver, and trailered drift boat as if all three might blow up. "Mikey," I asked, sliding into the passenger seat, "what is it about you that freaks everybody out?"

Love Scenes

Clockwise from top left: Dvorak high above the Smith; choosing a winner; happy hour; the Pathfinder at home.

Iron Will

Dvorak checks the Smith's level, color, and clarity.



FIFTY MILES NORTH OF SAN FRANCISCO WAS LIKE BEING IN ANOTHER STATE.

“Beats me, man.” I got the feeling that Mikey was so accustomed to this phenomenon that it hardly registered anymore.

It was late. We’d sleep that night on the 44-foot boat he kept in a marina near Half Moon Bay, then drive north tomorrow, looking for whichever steelhead river would clear up first. Mikey said the boat was a 1949 naval rescue vessel that he’d bought at auction, along with the commercial ocean salmon fishing license attached to it. It had seemed like a way to make some money. In fact, he’d had a remarkably good first year, bringing in 23,000 pounds of salmon, worth more than \$100,000.

Mikey’s boat was a floating version of his truck, the hands-down winner of any Most Derelict Vessel contest in the large marina. I suspected that Mikey was less than an authority on seamanship, and I damn sure knew the boat would have failed any inspection. And yet Mikey had somehow succeeded in a very competitive industry. As long as fish were involved, Mikey found a way.

I bunked that night on a narrow bench in the wheelhouse. Mikey bid me good night and disappeared into the hold. Presumably he had a bed down there somewhere. In a way, it was a shame the harbor police didn’t have a profile of a meth user’s boat. A good search was exactly what that boat needed.

The next morning we rolled north. “We’re chasing the chrome,” Mikey said, referring to the silvery appearance of a steelhead fresh from the ocean. The longer the fish stayed in the river, the more they reverted to rainbow trout

colors. Fifty miles north of San Francisco was like being in another state. Everything changed. The towns were small, and each was smaller than the one before. It was redwood country; trees with tops you couldn’t see growing on steep, rugged mountains. Mikey started making phone calls to half a dozen guiding buddies. All the steelhead rivers—the Napa, Russian, Noyo, Eel, Van Duzen, Trinity, Mad, Klamath, and Smith—were blown out. “We’re probably screwed for the next two days wherever we go,” he said.

Which river would clear first depended on a multitude of factors: today’s level; how much rain had fallen and how much more might come; the extent to which degradation from lumbering, mining, and the cultivation of grapes and marijuana increased the river’s runoff; and the river’s record of recovery after rains in recent years. There were so many factors in play that it was impossible to take them all into account. Mikey sifted the data and decided to bet on the Smith, one of the most intact river systems in the state. It had received the least rain and had the most favorable forecast, at that moment anyway. It was also 350 miles north. Off we went.

As we drove, I asked Mikey if this was the same Pathfinder we’d driven in two years ago to chase white seabass. “No, this is the second I’ve had since then.” Mikey, I was to learn, bought Pathfinders exclusively, never paid more than a grand, and drove them until the wheels came off. “But only the first generation, ’85 to ’95. Those were tanks, man. After ’96,

they got all round and fruity-looking. Stopped being a truck, you know?” This was his sixth. He’d bought it a year ago, with 200,000 miles on it. He’d put on 66,000 since then. I asked what he’d paid. “Seven hundred and twenty-two bucks,” he said. And smiled.

“Sounds like you’ve got the truck thing down,” I said.

“Yeah, but I got a problem with boats.”

“How so?”

“I can’t get rid of ’em. I’ve got six right now.” These included the 17-foot drift boat we were towing, a 9-foot Avon inflatable, a 14-foot Wahoo, a 16-foot Wellcraft (“in a marina in Alameda”), a 20-foot Mako, and the 44-foot salmon boat. This inconsistency—the way he could be brutally practical about trucks and completely sentimental about boats—was typical Mikey. “It’s hard to explain,” he said. “But a boat, it becomes, I don’t know, *who I am*. And they’re not all great boats. But there are things about my own personality that I don’t like, O.K.? But I’m stuck with them. I can’t disown them. Does that make sense?” Of course it didn’t. But I understood it.

+ Racing the Rain

We found a motel in Crescent City, close to the river, and woke the next morning to light rain. By now, having discovered that my phone could get on the Internet, Mikey was borrowing it every hour. The reports he was looking at said the rain might stop. It didn’t. Soon it was raining hard. Mikey decided we should head up into Oregon and check the

Chetco. "It's on the other side of a ridge that sometimes splits weather systems," he explained. This seemed like a fool's errand. An unrelenting downpour like this one was anything but localized. But we went anyway. It was raining just as hard in Oregon.

Mikey didn't despair. The thing, it seemed, was to maintain momentum, keep chasing. He took me to the house of a guiding buddy in the area, Jim Burn. Jim knew the Smith as well as anybody. The two of them sat in front of Jim's computer for the next several hours, poring over water levels and weather reports while I played with Jim's dog.

The guides were as different as two guys could be and share the same passion for steelhead. Mikey's boat, for example, while neater than his truck, was still pretty funky. Jim's boat was spotless. He even had a "bra" to protect it from debris when towed.

Eventually they concluded that there was no use even trying to fish the river until the next day. They adjourned to Jim's garage and spent the next two hours in what seemed to be a longstanding ritual, in which each showed off his newest lures while energetically insulting the other's. Each had hundreds of steelhead plugs, the most prized of which were "pre-Rapala" Storm Wiggle Warts, Magnum Warts, Wee Warts, and PeeWee Warts. After Rapala acquired Storm in the late 1990s, I was told, they destroyed the original Storm molds and moved production to China. The new ones had lost the distinctive "hunting" action of the best Storms. They had steel rattles rather than lead, which resulted in a harsher sound. The plastic was different. They were disasters. Now, they told me, old Storm lures in rare or desirable patterns went for as much as \$100 on eBay. Mikey showed Jim one of his favorites, a pearl-colored PeeWee Wart that he'd recently bought for \$50 from a seller called Plugwhore. It was a tiny thing, but Mikey maintained that its action was fantastic. "Oh, yeah, I've bought from Plugwhore," Jim said, then explained in detail why Mikey's lures, both in general and individually, sucked. Mikey returned the favor.

While the finer points escaped me, I did learn a bit of plug terminology. A light-colored lure with a red back was said to have a "rash." Black glitter was a "Michael Jackson." Black-and-white was a "cop." Silver-and-black was an "Oakland Raider." And chrome pink with a black bill was a "Dr. Death."

It wasn't until the next day, the fourth of the trip, that we finally threw a line in the water. And that was bank fishing, throwing weighted clusters of salmon roe rolled in borax, the better to make the eggs adhere to one another, into the Smith. I think Mikey and Jim knew the



Keep on Truckin'

Dvorak picks through one of his many gear tubs. Bottom: A nice steelie from the Eel River.

river was too high, that the fish were hunkered down until the water cleared. But maybe fishing when you knew damn well it was pointless was an act of faith, a demonstration of your humility to the river gods.

The Smith dropped a foot over the course of that day (we marked the changing levels with branches stuck into the bank), but in eight hours of fishing, not one of our three rods got so much as a bump. A few people stopped by to chat with Jim and ask about the river. By this time, Mikey had tired of telling people I was an outdoor writer. His new story was that—despite looking like a middle-aged bald guy—I was actually a Make-A-Wish kid with one of those premature aging diseases who wanted to catch a steelhead before what would be his 11th and, tragically, final birthday. Mikey said that it was his mission to make that happen.

We tried again for a few hours the next morning in a deep gorge of the river, the descent into which required holding my rod in my mouth so I could use all four limbs. The Smith is a gorgeous river, but parts of it were just plain scary. Fall off your rock where we were, for example, and you wouldn't be coming up anytime soon. Back at the truck, Mikey decided our last, best shot was a small river 150 miles south, which he forbade me to name. I didn't question his choice. Neither did Jim, who followed us.

+ Steeling Secrets

When we left the coastal highway, it was like finding another world inside another world,

one even more remote and beautiful. We crossed a range of mountains, corkscrewing our way up over dirt roads through country where you'd go for miles without seeing a house. We rounded a bend and were looking at miles of undeveloped coastline, rocks the size of houses in the surf, which broke hundreds of yards offshore. "Wow, Mikey, this is incredible," I said.

"My happy place," he said. "It's known but not really known. I mean people know it's here, but most of them think it's just another steelhead river." I didn't. I thought we'd landed in paradise.

We got to the river itself an hour before sunset. Mikey wanted to back the boat in and throw plugs from it for a while, get reacquainted with the water, maybe catch a fish. Jim countered that Mikey, as usual, had everything ass-backward.

"Look, we don't know where we're staying. We don't know where we're going to eat tonight. The way to do this is get squared away tonight and do it right first thing in the morning."

"C'mon Jim," Mikey coaxed. "For once in your life just relax and go with it. Fish for half an hour and then we'll go figure all that out. There's still time."

For the next half hour, they argued. Jim was by the book, linear, logical. Mikey was seat-of-the-pants, intuitive, eccentric. It was like listening to the two halves of my brain fight each other. By the time they finished, my head hurt and it was too late to fish.

Since it was all coming down to the next day, Mikey wanted to see if he could get some local intel. About 9 P.M., he swung the truck into a mostly deserted campground. When he saw a drift boat by one of the occupied sites, he made a beeline for it. "We come in peace!" Mikey bellowed. The boat belonged to an elderly couple, who had evidently just finished dinner and were talking quietly by the light of a kerosene lantern, their dishes stacked before them. It was hard to tell what they made of the little dude with a full beard and a bush of hair tucked up into a wool hat. But they smiled as if nothing was out of place.

They listened as Mikey told them the Make-A-Wish story. They knew he was full of it but didn't seem to mind. At a certain moment, however, the woman looked at Mikey curiously, cocked her head, and said, "Why, don't you know that you can't *plan* to catch a steelhead? Goodness! Everybody knows that. All you can do is go someplace where the fish might be, wait until

CONTINUED ON P. 74



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CHASING the CHROME

CONTINUED FROM P. 73 the water looks right, fish it hard, and hope you get lucky.”

“Absolutely!” Mikey agreed.

No one had bothered to tell me this, the first principle of steelhead fishing. Maybe, to guys like Mikey and Jim, it’s so obvious that it doesn’t bear mentioning. I’d slowly been making my way toward this fact on my own, but it was striking to hear it confirmed by a third party.

The man said that he hadn’t even put the boat in today. Tomorrow would be a little better, but the river needed at least two rainless days to fish well. Back at the truck, Mikey announced that he’d figured it out. If we were to have any chance on the river, it was essential that I ride in the trailered boat, drink deeply of whiskey, and savor the soft night air rushing by. “You need to do this, dude,” Mikey declared. “Trust me. The river needs to know you’re here. Plus, it’s just awesome.”

Mikey went on for a bit, making it sound like a carnival ride one moment, a solemn duty the next. It was, of course, an idiotic thing to do. But something had changed. We were chasing the chrome and I was in the grips of the chase. Mikey had sucked me into his world. What we were doing had become a pilgrimage, a quest. And although I still wanted terribly to catch a steelhead, I wanted even more to be true to the spirit of the trip, which meant giving it everything I had.

Thirty seconds later, I was sitting in the boat’s front chair, a rope in one hand, a bottle of bourbon in the other, both feet braced against the front rail, the liquor burning in my throat as I howled at the moon. I rode the trailered boat over bumps and potholes, around curves and plunging down straightaways. It was, on the one hand, a moron’s steeplechase, requiring nothing more than a total lack of common sense. But it was also glorious, flying through the night air with only the stars above and the river somewhere close. I realized that whatever happened tomorrow, everything would turn out fine. I had, unbeknownst to myself, entered Mikey’s world, the eternal present. The future would bring whatever it brought. The important thing was *now*. And no matter how it turned out, I was now taking one hell of a ride.

A few minutes of this turned out to be about all I really needed. I jarred my back pretty hard a few times. Through the back window, I could see Mikey and Jim, gesturing to each other. They had resumed their argument. It had become quite animated. They weren’t looking back and couldn’t hear no matter how loudly I shouted. There wasn’t anything in the boat I could throw onto the roof of the truck except my shoe, which I couldn’t really get to because I needed both feet to brace myself. It was another 5 miles before Mikey finally decided to check on me, at which point I told him to stop the damn truck.

Back at the little cottage we’d rented for the night, Mikey and Jim continued arguing. It was like listening to an old married couple rehash the same feud endlessly. Then, just before lights-out, I heard Jim’s voice from the other room. It sounded different, almost plaintive. “Mikey, you think the river might drop 18 inches overnight?”

“Yeah, maybe.”

“And maybe it’ll even get another 6 inches of visibility?”

“Yeah, could be,” Mikey said. He sounded like a parent reassuring a child that there was indeed a Santa Claus.

“O.K. Good night.”

The next day, we set out early. Mikey was at the oars, while Jim and I were plugging, in which you let out line 15, maybe 20 yards, engage your reel, and let the current impart action to your lure. Meanwhile, the guide rows to counteract the current and put your plug in the spots that might hold fish. In essence, it’s the guide rowing the boat who does the fishing. “It’s not the most romantic way to fish,” Mikey said.

"But in this kind of water, it's your best bet."

Just then, Jim's rod arced. "Fish on!" he cried, letting the fish fully take the plug before setting the hook. He passed the rod to me. I suddenly felt like the Make-A-Wish kid Mikey had made me out to be. I'd done nothing to catch this fish. But I dutifully reeled it in anyway. It fought hard, but not remarkably so, and within a minute or two I'd landed what both guides deemed an 11-pound hen, her sides bright. Both guides were adamant about releasing the fish quickly, and did so.

We were pumped at having hooked a fish so soon after launching. As time went by without another hookup, we began to despair of the quick-fish curse, that peculiar deal in which the omen of all-day success turns out to be false. We changed lures. Since we weren't finding fish in the fishy spots, Mikey began fishing unconventional ones. That didn't work, either.

Jim hooked another fish late in the float and again handed me the rod. I'm still not sure what I did wrong. Maybe I pressed it too hard. Maybe Jim should have cut more of his line off after the first fish. I saw the fish leap once in fast water, then the lure was gone.

It was over. It was late afternoon, and Mikey and I had 250 miles to cover to get back to the marina. My plane was leaving at seven the next morning.

+ An Unstoppable Force

As we drove south, I tried to sort through what I was feeling. There was some disappointment, but I was surprised at how insignificant it seemed. I would have liked to have caught more fish, but we had succeeded. We'd chased the chrome and landed one freshie. I was tired, but it was the pleasant fatigue of having done everything you could. I had no regrets.

About 150 miles north of San Francisco, Mikey left the highway. Within minutes we were bombing down dirt roads on which we saw almost no other vehicles. "Mikey, what's up?" I asked.

"This is one of the forks of the Eel," he said. "Got one last spot we gotta try. We'll get back later, but you can sleep on the plane."

I smiled. *How*, I wondered, *could you not love a guy like Mikey?*

We arrived at a small house, a little ranch, at the bottom of a dead-end road. "I know these folks," he said. "Good people."

It felt to me as if we'd just bailed out of the highway arbitrarily and driven down an anonymous dirt road. "What do you mean, you know these people?" I asked. "There must be hundreds of roads just like this one up and down the coast. What'd you do, drive down every one and ask if you could fish?"

Mikey looked at me. "Pretty much," he said,

F&S ADVENTURE

"if it bordered a steelhead river. Most of these people have let me park on their land and sleep in the truck at one time or another." He parked, left me in the truck while he went to have a word with the owners, and returned to tell me everything was cool.

There was maybe an hour of light left. We rigged up quickly, tying on sacks of red roe and slinky sinkers beneath slip bobbbers on spinning rods, and headed for the water. The bushes were so thick that there were only a couple of places you could cast from. It had been a long shot from the start, but I cast to a pool on the far side and drifted my bait through it half a dozen times. Then I moved to another spot, which involved climbing a boulder, and threw again. And then it was dark. We'd fished the sun all the way down. We'd given it everything we had. I felt a tremendous exhilaration.

As we drove back toward the highway, Mikey was already talking about how I'd have to come back next year, how we'd nail it. We stopped for gas. Mikey asked if he could borrow a few bucks. I said yes.

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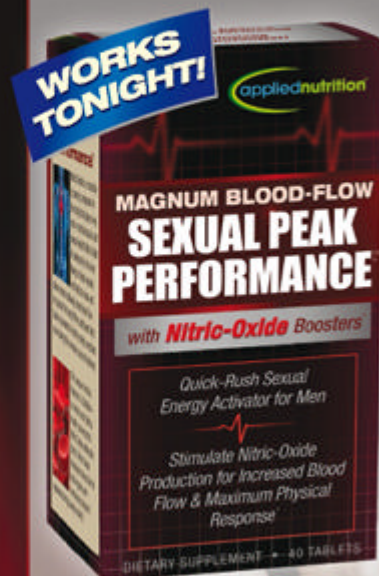
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ITEM 90899 98025/69096
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60688/61253/61282

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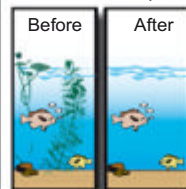
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THE STAND

It started as a regular deer hunt but became a revelation **By Bill Heavey**

THE MOST ORDINARY deer stand can somehow turn itself into a spiritually powerful place. I don't pretend to understand how this works. I do know that you can climb into one with a stranger and come down four hours later knowing things about him you probably don't know about your best friend.

I was sitting on a folding chair in a tower stand in central Arkansas on a raw October morning. I had the barrel of a loaner rifle, a 6.5x55 Swedish, resting on the rail as Mike Romine and I scanned a big cutover field with pine woods on three sides. He'd warned me that the deer on his club's lease rarely showed themselves for more than a few seconds. Mike is 58, with hands calloused from a lifetime of working outside. I'd only met him the day before, but there was something about him that I'd liked immediately. He seemed uncommonly aware of the gift of being alive.

Around 9 A.M., Mike rattled and a big 8-pointer came to the edge of the woods 300 yards away. It was a trophy—the biggest rack seen on club property in years, I learned later—but it was farther away than I felt comfortable shooting. I was almost glad that brush shielded its brisket. The deer melted back into the pines. We just sat for a good while. Then Mike, still watching the field, started talking in the singularly casual voice that some men reserve for the weightiest things. A little more than two years ago, his wife's younger brother had committed suicide in his favorite stand not far from where we sat. Mike had been 21 and Barry 13 when they met. "Basically, he was my little brother. We loved each other. I was the one who got him into deer hunting and the club. He loved hunting and loved this place." Mike was the last to see Barry alive and the first to see him afterward. He'd arrived to find blood spattered on the walls of the stand and his brother-in-law on the floor next to a 20-gauge slug gun. With an EMT on speakerphone, Mike had administered chest compressions and breaths to a dead man until a police car arrived.

I didn't know why Mike was telling me



this. The reason didn't matter. What did was that I'd just entered his world. Beneath his calm voice, I felt the emotional annihilation a suicide inflicts on the survivors—devastation, anguish, anger, and bewilderment. When Barry had blown away his own heart, he taken a great many others' with him. The news had just about done in Barry's parents, his four sisters, a slew of nieces and nephews. I was overcome by this rush of knowledge and by Mike's selflessness. Here was a man in great pain who was nonetheless more concerned with others' suffering than his own. I blinked back tears and pretended to study my side of the field.

Mike had watched the coroner bag up Barry's body. He'd stood there alone and watched as the little caravan of cars appeared and disappeared as the road rose and fell and finally curved away. He'd thought of how our lives were like that road—with highs and lows and places where the way ahead seemed to have washed out alto-

gether. Mike believed that God had given us the promise of everlasting life, but that first we had to do due diligence to this one, see it through even the bleakest times. And that we had a responsibility to love each other, help each other along the way.

What a man, I thought. What a tough, brave, tender son of a gun.

I remembered reading somewhere that most suicides were cases of mistaken identity. Which I understood to mean that acute depression—a tidal wave of unbearable self-loathing and despair—fooled you into thinking that your suffering and feelings of worthlessness were your identity rather than things you were going through.

I didn't say anything, but I reached out and clamped Mike's shoulder for a moment. We didn't say anything else about it. Mike rattled a couple more times. We saw two does cut the corner of the field as they traveled from one section of woods to another. But we didn't see the big buck again or any others. Two hours later, two men who had been strangers climbed down from the stand having shared something that I still can't quite put a name to. I felt richer for it and hoped Mike did, too. I hoped that the telling of his grief had lessened its weight.

As for me, I felt a mix of things. There are few honors higher than having a stranger trust you enough to share his deepest thoughts. And I did feel deeply honored. But I was also a bit anxious. Now I had to be as good a man as the one Mike had taken me for. While walking away, I glanced back at the stand. It looked like any other. Its power was as mysterious to me as anything else that had just happened. But I knew it was real. I'd felt it.

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